THE TURN OF THE ROAD

EUGENIA BROOKS FROTHINGHAM

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The Turn of the Road

Eugenia Brooks Frothingham

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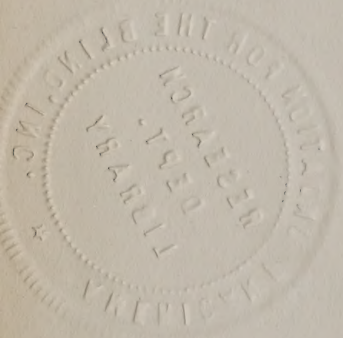

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TO

MY SISTER

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THE TURN OF THE ROAD

Chapter I

WINIFRED CHOOSES

THE June air was full of sunshine and the rapturous singing of bobolink and thrush. In the fields was a gay riot of wild flowers.

Winifred sang with careless, joyous passion as she walked in the garden between flaming poppy beds: —

"*Sweetheart, thy lips are touched with flame.*"

The clear young voice rang out gloriously. She flung her head back with a gesture of joyous abandonment, and her song rose higher in restless, swinging measures: —

"*Sweetheart, the blood leaps in thy cheek;*
Sweetheart, thy very heart-throbs speak;
Sweetheart" —

Her voice ceased suddenly as her eyes met those

of some one who leaned over the garden gate, watching her with amused admiration.

"Dan!" she exclaimed, "I did n't know I was singing to you."

"I was daring to hope you did," he answered with ready audacity, as he vaulted over the gate and joined her.

The flush in her face faded quickly, and she shook hands, with a laugh. In his level lips and steady eyes her mirth found no response, which was rare. Before speaking he hesitated, which was rarer still. He remembered certain documents in a green bag he carried, which would take the happy confidence out of her young life. He was unaccustomed to be the bearer of bad news; moreover, he loved this girl with the passion of his youth, with the strength of his manhood, and from the depths of his soul. So he hesitated, not knowing how to tell her, and the shadow deepened on his face.

Winifred looked perplexed.

"You are worried, or something," she said lightly. "I am sure it is the fault of the green bag, and I don't blame you. Drop it behind the lilac bush, and come and see my roses."

Dan ignored the words. "I have news for you," he said.

"News for me?" questioned Winifred. "It is bad news," she added quickly.

"Yes, bad news."

She looked at him for a moment in displeased silence.

"I know what it is: the will has been found, and papa has left half our money to a home for aged ladies and trade unions." She smiled, half bitterly, half contemptuously.

"No will has been found," he answered her gravely, and they walked to the house through the brilliant garden.

Winifred looked a sombre young figure in her black dress, with her masses of dark hair, and a seriousness on her face as rare as it was striking. Her personality was too strong and independent to be wholly feminine, nor was she a girl the average man would love or be happy in loving. An affair with her would involve elements of doubt and fear — doubt of winning her, fear of her restive power when won.

The man who walked beside her now, with the obstinate chin and daring eyes, neither doubted the one nor feared the other. He had loved her since they were boy and girl, and as desire and possession were synonymous terms in his vocabulary he had vowed within himself to win her. As yet his confidence

seemed somewhat misplaced, and it was in this connection that his best friend had been known to say, "Howard is a man who should fail in something, lest he grow to fancying himself omnipotent."

There was no arrogance now in the eyes that looked down into hers; only a grave, protective tenderness.

"Win," he began, when they were seated on the broad veranda, "you must prepare yourself for a great blow. I don't ask you to be brave, for I know you can never be anything else." He paused. Her eyes, questioning but fearless, met his.

"You remember," he went on, "that last week we found a clue to the whereabouts of your father's safety vault, and you gave me your written permission to open it. I did so yesterday, and found only worthless bonds, some few certificates of good stock, and records of vast sales of property made during the last years of his life, when he seems to have lived entirely on his principal. This was almost exhausted at the time of his death."

Winifred was pale, but her eyes did not falter. "How much is left?" she asked.

"Enough to yield you and Edith about fifteen hundred a year."

"And the extravagant improvements made on the place last winter?"

"They were done on credit."

"And there was no credit?"

"There was no credit."

She drew in her breath quickly.

"Of course we must pay the money back at once, if we starve for it. Oh, it is shameful — shameful." A flush half of anger, half of pain, came into her face. She rose, and leaning on the balustrade looked out on the sunlight and flowers. Dan tramped up and down the piazza noisily. He wanted very much to swear.

"So we are poor," she said wonderingly, trying to adjust her thoughts to the fact. "We are poor — and in debt." Here was a very tangible, practical fact. She flushed again.

Dan sat down astride of a chair and folded his arms on the back.

"The place ought to bring fifty thousand," he said practically. "That would more than pay all you owe, and leave something to invest. Walter should see to it for you."

Winifred flung out her strong young arms with an impatient gesture. "How Aunt Betsy and Uncle Charles will moan over and pity us! I feel my temper rising in anticipation. I have had so much pity during the past weeks that I can't stand another ounce of it."

She paused, and a swift change came into her face and voice.

"Dan, I want to tell you something — something that I am more ashamed of than of anything else in the world — something" — She hesitated; there was almost a tremor on her lips.

"Yes, Win; out with it," came Dan's deep voice. His lips were commendably grave, but in his eyes was amused incredulity.

"I want to tell you because — because I want you to know me just as I am, and because I feel I am not honest in taking sympathy from you when I don't need it, and because now that this wrong of father's has come to us I may say things."

"Yes, Win."

Her face was white, but she went on hurriedly: "Every one thought, because I did not lose my head or cry at the time of father's death, that I was strong and proud, but broken-hearted. I was not. I mean I did not really grieve for one single hour."

"I knew it, dear."

"You knew it?" she asked in astonishment. "Then how can you go on — caring, if you know me so well? Oh, you can't think of the shame I felt when they all kissed and cried over me and called me a brave girl! How ashamed I felt when I

thought of father, and how he loved me best! Of course I was fond of him and missed him dreadfully, but it was not love and it was not grief. I know that very well; I know what they both must be, though I can't seem really to love any one in the whole world. Only a little while after he died, I was thinking with part of me that it was good to be free, so that I could go abroad and study singing." Her eyes were dark with remorseful passion. "Dan, why don't you tell me you despise me? Why don't you say something?"

"I can never say less than this to you, dear," he answered, and taking her hand in his kissed it reverently. Then he went on in his deep, rich voice while he kept her hand: "Whether you love or not, you are always the bravest, truest woman in the world, the one prize in life most worth winning. Some day you will love, and so well that it is worth while losing the lesser love of a thousand lesser women for the chance of winning you and yours."

For the moment he was holding her in the spell of his eyes and words. She did not withdraw her hand.

"Dan," she almost whispered, "can't you *make* me love you?"

"Yes, dear, some day I shall find the way."

Her being was vibrating with a hint of something strange, and strong, and madly sweet, but it was only a hint. Fortunately Dan knew this.

He knew that her powerful nature was crude as yet; that she must come up to many of her milestones and discover their small value before she would pause and hearken to the deep whisperings of life and love. Some of her lamps must be put out before she could see the stars.

The light died quickly in her eyes, and she withdrew her hand and nature from him. There was a rushing in his ears, and for an instant the sunlight looked red; but he controlled himself, and forced his voice to a steady if constrained quiet, while he discussed with her such commonplace details as the placing of property, the payment of debts, and the adjustment of living expenses to a reduced income. He even brought her to investigate certain contents of the green bag, and explained technical points with praiseworthy steadiness, while she leaned over his shoulder.

When there came a pause she looked at him quizzically and somewhat doubtfully. The color had come back to her face and the confidence to her bearing.

"Of course you know what I am going to do," she said, a suppressed excitement in her voice.

"Yes," answered Dan, bending his head over the papers he held.

"Now don't spoil it by objecting. Besides, objecting won't do the smallest good."

"I am not objecting. Have you any idea how soon you start?"

"Just as soon as I can settle estates, debts, and so forth, here. That ought to be by early autumn, don't you think so? It *must* be early autumn. Oh, how blissful it will be, back in my dear Europe, free, and learning to be a great artist! There is no reason why I should n't go on the stage now, and every reason why I should. Edith and I are poor, and I must make money for us both. I am glad we are poor — do you hear me, Dan? — glad. The world shall be at my feet; I shall have everything I want, and more — more. Ah, it is glorious to think of. Dan, you don't know — you don't know!"

Dan made no answer. She paced restlessly to and fro on the piazza.

"I shall succeed," she went on — "I know that. I was made for success, just as you were. Nature never cut me out for a mere paving stone. Why don't you say something? Oh, how irritating you are! Why don't you say you feel sure I shall succeed?" She stopped in front of him.

"Because I don't feel sure of it," he answered.

"Dan!" She looked at him in wide-eyed astonishment and some displeasure. "How absurd! Why don't you think so? I should like to know simply for the sake of argument. Of course I don't really care what you think, because you don't know. You are a very clever lawyer, and have, I am told, exceptional powers of convincing juries of things they don't want to believe, that no reasonable person could believe, and that you probably don't believe yourself; but that does n't prove you know anything of the elements that go to make up a great singer. Now will you kindly tell me what I lack? Have n't I voice?"

"Yes."

"And is n't it beautiful?"

"It is beautiful."

"Well, then. Can't I act?"

"Up to a certain point."

"Up to a certain point? What do you mean by that?"

"I mean that you can act well up to a certain point."

"So you said before."

"I will say it again, if you wish."

Winifred was irritated, Dan correspondingly amused. Then, with feminine tact, she carried her point by an appeal to his most vulnerable quarter.

"Dan, please don't chaff. You know that, whatever I say, I care for your opinion more than I do for any one else's. I really want to know what you think I lack."

He was only softened within certain limits. "Well, then, I think you are crude. You cannot be great at any art till you put some of your life's blood into it, and you have n't been bled yet."

"Oh, is that all?" she said, with a sigh of relief. "Then I don't mind. Your words are only theory. I have temperament, and that anticipates all experience of an emotional kind, lives it in the nerves and imagination. Musicians don't need to live; through music alone they learn all that is greatest of love and life."

"That is only another theory," said Dan obstinately. "The proposition that temperament takes the place of and anticipates experience remains to be proved."

"Proof? Nonsense! A woman does n't need proof. She knows."

"Exactly," said Dan dryly, "she knows."

"Well, what more do you want than knowing? Dan, you are laughing at me!"

Then she laughed herself, with good-humored appreciation of his point of view, but went on immediately to express an unconscious sense of rebellion.

"Of course, I might have known you would put all sorts of objections in the way. You think a woman ought to stay at home and make a home; making a home means being troubled with pots and pans. You know very well I can't do that, and what do you want me to do? I ask you to answer me reasonably — what do you want me to do?"

This was a reckless question, and Dan answered as she might have known he would: —

"Marry me."

She flushed and moved uneasily. "You know that is more impossible than anything else." Her voice dropped a little. "Please don't talk so any more. I mean, what do you expect me to do? An unmarried woman has her choice of four things: society, charity, literary clubs, and melancholia. I don't feel inclined to any of those. There is one thing more: I can follow out some of papa's socialistic studies. I can think about the greatest good of the greatest number. I can have theories concerning the disposition of economic rent; not that I could ever understand what economic rent was, but I suppose I could learn in time, as other people have. I could even form a woman's club for the propagation of my ideas, and write pamphlets, and" —

"God forbid!" ejaculated Dan fervently.

"Very well, then, what is the use in talking about it?"

"I can't imagine," he answered quietly, with a tormenting smile; then he added more seriously: "Don't let us misunderstand each other any longer, Win. I can't say I am glad to have you go away and study for the stage; but, all things considered, I think you are doing the only thing you can do."

"Then why could n't you have said so in the beginning?" Winifred was only partly pacified.

"In the first place you did n't give me a chance. Then I am usually so weak-minded with you that my self-respect now and then requires the stimulus of teasing you." He rose. "And now good-by. I have some work to do on an important case, when I must deal with a more than usually obstinate jury. Shall I put the estate into the hands of a broker? I can see to it without troubling you to come up to town. No, don't thank me; that is n't allowed, you know; besides, it 's no trouble. I shall be down again in a day or two with some papers for you and Edith to sign. I hope the poor child will take the loss of her fortune as easily as you have done. Good-by again."

Before she could speak he had gone. With softening eyes she watched the retreating figure.

"Dear old Dan!" she said. "What should I do without him? I suppose I ought to give him up, but I'm too selfish. Besides, he would n't go." She smiled with pride in his strength.

Three months later Winifred and her sister were leaning over the side of an Atlantic liner, and watching idly the confusion of leave-taking and baggage-hunting going on between deck and wharf. There was only one more good-by to say; then the great ocean — the new life! Winifred told herself she was jubilant, and held her head high. Her eyes were bright and her face pale. Edith's mouth was quivering, and her eyes were suspiciously red; but she said nothing. Then Dan appeared from the cabin; his face looked worn, but he spoke with determined cheeriness. "There are your table seats," he said. "I have said a good word for you with the captain, and your fee will have due effect on the steward, I don't doubt. I wish you had felt like affording outside staterooms; yours seem stuffy. Mrs. Smith thinks her berth is small, and said there was no place in the brackets for her cologne bottle. She is rather tearful; but she will feel better in a day or so, I dare say. She is old, eminently respectable, and will let you have your own way; so she possesses the essentials. Where

are you putting your tickets? That is n't safe. How will you ever learn to take care of your things? Fold them this way — see."

"Yes," said Winifred with unusual meekness, "I think I understand. They are almost as hard to fold as time-tables. There, Dan, that 's the bell for you to go. Please go — it makes me nervous. I hate saying good-by. Please go — now — they are taking up the gangway."

"That 's all right," said Dan coolly. "I made arrangements to go on with you a bit and take the tug back. You don't look as pleased as you ought to, to hear it. Edith, you look tired. Has n't the headache gone?"

"No. I think I should like to lie down, if I could find my chair."

There was a little catch in Edith's voice, for a strip of green water was widening between them and home.

"Your chair is here. It 's a little windy now, but when we get out more to sea the breeze will be on the other side. I arranged it on purpose. Here are the shawls; let me undo them and spread one on the chair before you sit down. They are first cousins to gridirons, these chairs, but you can circumvent them with practice. Is that all right? Shan't I open your umbrella? There is nothing

like an umbrella for keeping off wind. Now are you comfortable?"

"Yes, thank you. How kind you are! You think of everything. I am sorry to reward you by crying. I know men hate it, but I can't help it."

"That 's all right," said Dan kindly. "I like to see a woman cry sometimes."

Then he went back to Winifred. He had never seen her cry. "We will walk," he said. "There are one or two things I want to say to you. We may not see each other again for a long time."

"I know, Dan," she broke in hurriedly; "I have something to say also. I meant to write it, but that 's because I am a coward. I think I had better say it now. First, I want to thank you — oh, but I can't thank you enough for all you have done, when I think what you give me, and what I" —

"Stop there, Win. I don't want thanks, and I don't want reward, even supposing I deserved either. To serve you is and must always be" — He paused, and closed his lips firmly on the words in his heart. The strain of prolonged leave-taking was wearing on his nerves.

"That is just what I have been thinking about," Winifred went on. "Things can't go on as they are. You are too good a man for some woman to miss. Your love is too precious to be poured out

before some one like me, who — I was just thinking now, when I saw you taking care of Edith, that I have somehow missed the right angle of womanhood."

"You will find it," he broke in.

"Don't make it hard for me," she continued; "I am not the kind that loves and marries. I am going away forever, perhaps, and this is the moment for us to say good-by; our friendship must end. I can't ever forget you — I don't think I shall ever find any one to take your place; but it is best — it must be. I don't want you to write to me; I shall not write you. I want you to put me out of your life" — Her voice had grown so very low that Dan bent his head to listen.

When she paused, he smiled.

"That reminds me," he said, "you have n't given me the address of your *pension* in Paris. I may write there instead of to the bank. I shall expect a letter from you once a month at least, and if you ever write me such nonsense as you have just spoken, I shall be obliged to cross the ocean at once and marry you against your will."

Winifred drew a deep breath and then laughed — a short, low laugh that had something of triumph in it. She gave him a whimsical sidelong glance.

"I do like your combativeness, Dan," she said.

"Did you dream for the shadow of a second that I would let you go?" he asked.

"I don't know; I tried to believe it, because I know it's right that you should."

"But you did n't want to believe it?"

"No. I should miss you more than — any one."

"Thank you, Win."

For a while they walked in silence. Most of the passengers were in their staterooms, and the deck was deserted. The great steamer began to throb rhythmically to her depths with a mighty life of steam and steel. The wind from out of the sea came to meet them, and its first greeting thrilled mournfully in the rigging.

Dan kept his eyes on the watery horizon. There were deepening lines round his mouth, and his face looked older than his years. Win easily kept pace with his swinging stride; but there was an odd hollow feeling at her heart. She shivered and drew her cloak about her, wishing that Dan were gone.

He turned at her movement. "You don't look right," he said; "surely this motion is not too much?"

"No, but I don't feel altogether natural. I very much suspect, Dan, I very much suspect that I don't like saying good-by to you." She smiled

as she spoke, with a full, candid look into his eyes.

Dan stooped to fasten her cloak. "Let us sit down," he said. And then, during the time that remained, he spoke to her only of his love — spoke passionately, tenderly, powerfully always, with a certain sturdy eloquence entirely his own. Winifred listened in silence, and was moved as only he had power to move her; but she did not answer him, and kept a pale face turned to the sea. When a shrill, discordant whistle surprised them, and a tug appeared suddenly under their bows, she started.

"It 's the tug!" she cried.

"Yes." Dan wheeled about and caught her hands. "Dearest, one word more. You don't know what you are going to, what temptations you are going to have. But whatever comes to you, however you are tempted, however you yield — you don't know what I am talking about, but you will learn too soon — I am ready to be at your side to take your part against the world; for whether you ever love me or not, you will always be the greatest thing in the world to me, the greatest happiness, the greatest pain — the Alpha and Omega of all my life. Never forget this: whatever danger threatens, whatever happens, never forget to say, 'Dan

loves me for better, for worse.' Promise to remember that, dear. 'Dan loves me for better, for worse, and is always there when I need him.' "

"Oh, I am not worth it — I am not — I can't give it back."

"That is my affair. Promise me, Win."

"Yes, Dan."

A warning cry came from the tug.

"Good-by, my love — good-by."

"Don't forget," he called up to her from where he swung on the ladder, halfway down the steamer's side.

"No. Oh, Dan, good-by — good-by."

Chapter II

INTERLUDE

WHEN Dan went back to his room that night, Walter Garrison, the friend he lived with, looked at him doubtfully over the edge of the "Transcript."

"Why were n't you at your office this morning?" he asked.

Dan rolled a cigarette in silence. "Can you give me a light?" he said finally; and that was the only answer Walter received, and the last time he asked that particular question.

Walter Garrison was Dan's most intimate friend, which means that they shared the same apartment, breakfasted and dined together, spoke little, held opposite views on nearly everything concerning this life or the next, and would have cheerfully cut off their right arm for each other, if such a sacrifice had seemed beneficial.

Dan always said that Walter had been born several centuries too late. If he could have lived in the time when all ladies were fair and all men

were brave, and when evil was a thing to be fought with a spotless name and silver armor, he would have made his mark. As it was, he dealt in corporation paper and collateral loans, wore the unpicturesque garb of the nineteenth century, and, concealing his sensitiveness and chivalry under a rough beard and a slow manner, passed as a very commonplace young man indeed.

The friendship between the two men began in their boyhood on the mutual discovery of a good place for finding angleworms; it had lasted through the rough-edged gladness of college life, and it held fast in their early manhood, though Walter was a struggling note broker, and Dan the most successful lawyer of his age in the State, and though there was the name of a woman which could never be mentioned between them.

During the days at Harvard they had roomed together as they did now. The arrangement had been mutually satisfactory in spite of difference of temperament and belief. Dan read Plato, while Walter went to church. Dan loved such diverging possibilities as the classics and football; he was aggressive in both. Walter plodded through the average college courses, and preferred rowing to the strenuous wrestling of football fields; he was aggressive in nothing. Dan was confident with

what his enemies called "confounded arrogance," and his friends considered "splendid audacity." He thought with lightning-like speed and power, but Walter's mind moved slowly and obstinately; his ideas were more easily formed than changed.

It was in his Junior year that Dan one day rescued Winifred from drowning, and discovered while bearing her to the shore that he loved her. He told her so before her hair had time to dry, and though she did not laugh, she treated the matter lightly and reproached him for having spoiled their fun. Then Dan went back to college with an added doggedness of jaw, and spent hours in silences that were never satisfactorily explained.

During the years that followed he laid his best at her feet, and she learned to accept it as a matter of course. There were times when he grew restive and claimed impossible things, when his words made her cheek burn and his eyes shamed her light indifference; but Winifred's spirit was cool and free; she defied him easily.

So Dan went hungry through his early manhood, and about his mouth there came lines that do not belong to youth.

Walter disliked Winifred; she was too self-assertive, and according to his views there must be something wrong about a girl who did not return

Dan's love. He hoped her departure for Europe and intention to go on the stage would end Dan's hopes and desires, but asked no questions.

And Dan was not forgetting. His working hours were troubled with visions of Winifred imprudently going with wet feet in a new climate, and committing hygienic offenses against which there was no one to warn her. He wrote pages of instructions, and to her amused protestations he agreed, adding, "But you see I had rather the world begged than that you should want for a glove."

Winifred, on her side, was rapidly learning care of herself, and other singers' lessons of renounced freedom, limited amusement, and general slavery to the condition of vocal cords.

"Whoever could think you would submit to all these precautions, Win?" said Edith, when her sister wrapped her throat in scarfs and refused to go out damp evenings. "Have you written Dan that you have given up talking except on state occasions?"

"That is only when I have a cold," protested Winifred.

"It seems to me you have colds very often; you never used to have them. Perhaps it's the climate."

"No, I am afraid it 's just because they 're so inconvenient now."

"I hope it will all come out right," sighed Edith.

"It must come out right," said Winifred.

"What must?" asked a third voice from the doorway.

Edith welcomed the visitor cordially, inwardly asking herself why Kate always seemed ill or unhappy; Winifred indifferently, and wondering why she could never like her.

Kate Randolph possessed that "elegant superficiality" which is the graceful mask of women of the world. It would be difficult to tell what she thought on any subject whatsoever, or if she thought at all. A shallow woman, people called her — dainty, exquisite, patrician, thinking little, feeling less, and one to whom a crime would be easier than an act of bad taste. But there were her eyes which could not be accounted for — large, dark, hungry eyes, that had no right to be in that delicate face, and that gave the lie to her thin lips. Moreover, there were whispers about Kate to which no one gave open credence, because she was Katherine Randolph, and the name of Randolph could cover a multitude of sins; but it was suspected that Kate had been responsible for Jack Sunder-

land's going wrong, and her best friends could not defend her treatment of Lord de Normandy. That she was untruthful no one attempted to deny, and she was worldly; but public opinion was her conscience, so she would keep straight — if it were not for those eyes.

"What must come right?" she repeated, when greetings were over. "If Winifred says it must, it will; but what is it?" Kate handled her words daintily.

"It 's the voice," explained Edith. "Winifred does not think things are going well."

"Oh, I am so sorry!" exclaimed Kate. "I was looking forward to hearing you."

Winifred smiled an irritating smile, delicately suggestive of incredulity.

"You do not believe me?" Kate's eyes changed suddenly till they overweighted the flower-like face, and the effect, coming as it did in the midst of her light chatter, was almost startling. Edith wondered why it was that Kate so often looked at Winifred in this way.

Winifred's eyes had met Kate's with an expression of cool inquiry. "I did n't know you were fond of music."

"I wish I were not," said Kate; "it makes me" —

"You surely don't mean *cry?*" interrupted Edith.

"No, it makes me wish I could. It makes me think of everything I am not, and reminds me of all I want to forget. So you see how very much I must have wanted to hear you sing."

Kate never laughed; but she smiled now, and the smile and ease of her last words contradicted the sudden weariness of her first.

"Winifred has a strange effect upon her," reflected Edith. "When they are together she looks at no one else, and yet I always feel that she dislikes her."

"I doubt if Win will ever be able to sing to any one," she said aloud; "and if she does, it won't be before one or both of us have had melancholia. You cannot imagine how discouraging it is, Kate. She is always taking cold, which means two weeks without a lesson, and now, just as she was becoming acclimated, she finds that — What was it you found, Win? You were telling me when Kate came in."

"I seem to be singing wrong," said Winifred, forgetting her guest in gloomy preoccupation. "I could n't take a high C yesterday."

"Must she have a high C?" asked Kate innocently.

"She *says* she must," said Edith.

"Of course I must," replied Winifred, with some impatience. "There is n't a grand opera in the world that has n't a high C in it. A prima donna without a high C! Why, you might as well think of a nightingale without a trill."

"You see, it 's a very grave matter," explained Edith. "Everything about singing is a grave matter. I am sure Win will lose her sense of humor. Did you ever hear of an opera singer with a sense of humor?"

Kate's experience in opera singers was limited, and they let the matter rest on Edith's assertion that humor was incompatible with care of, and dependence upon, vocal cords.

Kate seemed to take more interest in the affair than the occasion required.

"Perhaps you will have to give it up, and go home," she said suddenly. "Perhaps your voice cannot stand professional work."

"Yes, it can," answered Winifred resentfully. "My voice is splendidly strong by nature, but I am being badly taught. I am not sure about the chest or head tones, but I know my middle is back."

"Your middle is back?" repeated Edith helplessly. "Win, dear, I hate to seem stupid, but what do you mean by your middle's being back?"

"I mean that my middle tones are not forward enough," explained Winifred, with some impatience.

"What does she mean by a tone's being forward or back?" asked Kate.

"I don't know," sighed Edith. "It is as bad as learning to talk golf."

Winifred tried to explain, but her audience was stupid and possibly uninterested.

"I cannot help feeling that it is all wasted time," said Edith inconsequently. "I do not mean the explanation, but your studying for the stage. We have been here over six months, and I don't see that much has been accomplished besides the loss of a high C. If this goes on much longer, I shall write Dan myself and tell him the truth. It is just possible that he might bring you to reason."

No one looking at Kate in that moment could have noticed anything except her eyes, and these eyes, dilating and darkening, were fixed upon Winifred's face.

"And I will tell him how imprudent you are about going out alone," continued Edith. "Win never thought of such a thing as prudence in her life," she added, addressing Kate, "and if she were beautiful she would have been in trouble more than once. Don't look surprised! She knows she

is not beautiful, and does n't mind at all; do you, Win?"

Winifred smiled. "I never think of it," she said.

Then Kate spoke with a bitterness that was like the escape of a hidden flame.

"If you were the most beautiful woman in the world, you would n't care!" she exclaimed. "If you had the greatest gift in the world, and the greatest love in the world, still you would n't care!"

Winifred looked out of the window and beyond the housetops to the clouds. There was a look of far-away things in her eyes, and her face was shaded with that gravity which Dan loved so well to see there.

"I wonder if you are not partly right?" she said.

Kate watched her with tightening lips. "Now I know why he loves her," she told herself. "She has something most of us lack — she is worthy of him. How I hate her!"

Then Kate took her leave with something less than her usual grace, and left Edith wondering over her abruptness, her odd outbursts of bitterness and passionate weariness. Kate did not appear to the world like this.

More self-absorbed than ever, Winifred relapsed

into the surprised and somewhat indignant gloom with which she met these first checks in her career.

"I wonder why she always seems to dislike you so much?" said Edith aloud.

"I have sometimes suspected she did n't altogether like me," observed Winifred.

"Sometimes suspected! Good heavens, Win, if I did n't know you were a thousand times cleverer than I am, I should often say you were positively stupid!"

Chapter III

KATE

MRS. RANDOLPH was awaiting her daughter's return in the private parlor, *au premier*, of the Hotel Westminster. Mrs. Randolph's face expressed a grievance, and Kate, when she entered, looked tired and restless.

"Where have you been?" asked her mother.

Kate was conscious of the grievance and the cause of it, but she chose to ignore both.

"I stopped at the Merediths'," she said lightly.

"Ah, was that very disagreeable Winifred there?"

"That very disagreeable Winifred was there."

"And you have missed a visit from Lord de Normandy."

"I supposed he would come, after his note. Are n't you going to give me some tea, mamma?"

The grievance was very evident now. "What note, Kate?"

"One I received last night. I knew he would

come this afternoon, and, as I did n't wish to see him, I went out."

"You are a very selfish and a very ungrateful daughter," Mrs. Randolph said, with some excitement.

"I am sorry, mamma, but I cannot marry Lord de Normandy. What did he say? Was he trying?"

"Lord de Normandy is a gentleman, my dear."

"Gentlemen are sometimes trying. What did he say?"

"He felt he had been badly treated, and he is justified in feeling so."

"I don't see that feeling has anything to do with it, mamma. It 's merely a question of American gold versus a foreign title; and it all happened a long time ago."

"We talked the affair over, and I could not defend you, though you are my own child," continued Mrs. Randolph. "When it came to your promising to marry him one morning, and taking back your word that very evening, for a mere whim — really, Kate" —

"I behaved badly, but I could n't help it," said Kate in a low voice of growing intensity.

"Nonsense, my dear; you speak like a child.

He could not be persuaded that you had not seen some one during his absence who had influenced you. I told him you were alone all the afternoon, but I remembered afterwards that some one had been sitting in the garden with you. I think it was Dan."

"It was Dan," said Kate.

"Yes, it comes back to me now, for you sat on the grass in your new white muslin, and ruined it. I remember the whole circumstance. Dan laughed when I was annoyed, and said sitting on the grass under apple blossoms was good for the soul, or something equally ridiculous."

"I remember," said Kate.

"Well, my child, it was all a great mistake, and I only hope you will think things over carefully, for Lord de Normandy dines with us to-morrow."

"That is as you like, mamma; but I cannot marry Lord de Normandy. I shall not marry any one. I had better say this now, so that we may avoid more trouble. I tried hard to marry him, and I meant to do so, until he came in the evening after that — that afternoon, you remember, and then I knew it was of no use to try any longer. I cannot marry."

Kate's face was pale, and certainly she was growing very odd. Her mother realized it with

resentment, intensified by the sense of her helplessness.

"You are mad, Kate," she said. "You are mad and reckless."

"I should be worse if I married."

"Kate! For what have I brought you into the world?"

"I don't know, mamma. I often wonder."

In her own room Kate flung herself face downward on the bed.

"Winifred does not care," she said. "She has what no other woman has, and does n't know it. Some day she will find out what the world is worth, and what the other is worth, and then" — Kate turned wearily on her side. "I wish I could cry," she said.

Chapter IV

NEARING THE FIRST MILESTONE

IT was two years later. Madame Alberto's class was drawing to a close, and Winifred was singing. The other pupils were seated about the room, silent, attentive, their faces expressing various degrees of wonder and reluctant admiration. Madame Alberto stood with her baton in her hand.

"*C'est une voix ça*," she said in an aside to her pupils. The tone implied that theirs were not voices; but they felt compelled to nod smilingly.

Winifred, with her height, her distinction, her talent, was queen among them, and wore the crown as lightly and carelessly as all else that came to her.

She stood now with her hands loosely clasped, her dark eyes on the treetops seen through the window, and sang on, indifferent alike to their jealousy or admiration. The aria chosen was from an Italian opera; it was not beautiful music, but it charmed the senses, and confused the critical power with a perfume, a *suavité*, a passionate,

sensuous sweetness, that the old Italian masters alone had at their command. She sang with the highly colored art of the Italian school, and her voice bewildered the listeners with its brilliancy and purity. The cheapness of the musical climax was forgotten in the wonder of its execution. One listened, breathless, to the working up of commonplace cadences that led to the inevitable high note, and compelled applause.

Madame looked at Winifred critically.

"The voice is glorious; you have rare intelligence. Your method is my own; *mais — il y a quelque chose qui manque ici.*" Madame pointed to her heart.

It was the old story, and Winifred frowned with helpless impatience.

"I have it," cried Madame suddenly: "you must fall in love. I do not say *une grande passion*, but *un petit sentiment*, just to fire the temperament, put tears in the voice. Take Bordeaux, now" — Madame pointed to the accompanist, a little man with black hair and mustache — "take Bordeaux, for instance; he has been casting eyes at you this long time."

There was a general laugh at this.

"It is only for Mademoiselle to say," Bordeaux replied gallantly.

Winifred just lifted her eyes to his, and then put her music together with an expression of cold disgust on her face. The vulgar brutality of the suggestion would have angered her had she not felt so immeasurably above it.

Madame's expression became one of displeasure. "*Sapristi!* You Americans are intolerable. Wait till you are on the stage, and see if it is easy to keep the airs of an empress."

"The next lesson is at ten, is it not?" Winifred asked quietly, meeting many pairs of disapproving eyes with her cool New England gaze. There was even a smile on her lips as she left the room with brief words of farewell. She knew she had made an eternal enemy of Bordeaux, and that her fellow pupils had been enemies from the first, but these facts were beneath her notice.

As she walked home on the shady side of the well-known lane that led from Madame Alberto's villa to her own lodgings, she remembered that Dan was coming in a day or two; and as it was by his annual visits that she measured her progress on the road to fame, she thought over in detail the occurrences of the past few months. There had been much success, and no actual failure; but her serene confidence in herself was becoming troubled. As Madame had said, something was lacking.

While it had been a question of mere study, she had held the first place; but now it was a question of artistic completion, and there were those without her voice or intelligence who were pleasing the managers that passed her by. Winifred frowned at the thought, but held her head defiantly high. Her eyes expressed indignation and surprise, but no discouragement.

A few days later Dan came. She was unfeignedly glad to see him.

"*Dan is coming to-day, to-day,*
Dan is coming to-day,"

she caught herself singing on the morning of his expected arrival. "How do you suppose he will look? It is ages and ages since I have seen him. I wonder if he will find me changed? And will he like my singing? But of course he can't help that."

"Really, Win, you are growing insufferably conceited. I hope he will not — and will you either go out of the room or stop talking. I have n't been allowed to write a straight sentence during the last half hour."

"I am going out to sit on the doorsteps in the sun," said Winifred. "Sitting on the doorsteps is a solace for all the ills of existence."

It was there that Dan found her, and, possessing himself of both her hands, devoured her with his eyes in a silence that she dared not break. In the strong face, almost haggard with eagerness, that bent above hers, she read what made her life seem small.

"You are the same," he said at last, "only a little grave just now."

"You make me so, Dan," she answered very low, not trying to withdraw her hands. Then, with her face raised to his, "You have changed. You look as if you had been fighting battles, and conquering."

He smiled. "The hardest fight is still to be lost or won," he told her.

With one accord they turned and walked through the village street, and beyond to the sunny, windy hillside. Winifred spoke of her hopes, her plans, and a thousand details of her life, while he listened eagerly, scolding her now and then, as was his wont, but generally silent in the strong joy of being near her. When she talked of her career, Dan noticed little lines between her eyebrows that did not belong to the Win of old.

"Something is wrong," he told himself; and very soon she reluctantly confessed.

"I would not acknowledge it to any one in the

world but you," she said, "but it is not as easy as it seemed; there is something lacking, not in my gifts, but in me."

Dan generously refrained from saying, "I told you so."

"I can command admiration, but I cannot capture enthusiasm, except by a high note every now and then. The public don't know much, but they do know when their hearts are touched, and I cannot reach their hearts."

She sighed impatiently, and Dan wondered if the years were not taking her further from him.

"If you loved your art for its own sake, I should feel better about it all," he said. "But you care only for such power and success as you can get out of it, not for anything you can put in."

"That is true," assented Winifred unexpectedly. "Art is not spelt with a big A for me. But I do want the success."

"And what do you expect to get from the success?"

"I do not know; but I am going to find out," she said, with a confident ring to her voice, and a glance of amused defiance at the man by her side. Then she sighed suddenly.

"The other day a little girl came to the class," she continued: "she was plain and ordinary, her

voice had neither volume nor range; but when she sang — I can't describe it, but the pupils were in tears, and Madame — Madame herself could not speak, and in her face one read all the might-have-beens. Think of it, Dan — that hardened old woman."

"Did you cry?" questioned Dan.

She shook her head. "No; but I felt so many things that it was some time before I remembered to wonder why I could n't move people so."

"You must be moved yourself first."

"That is trite, Dan."

"I know; but it 's true."

Winifred set her lips. "I believe there is another way."

"Very well; find it if you can. Don't look alarmed; I am not going to recommend myself as a medicine, or love as a means to an end. But you are crude still. Some day an awakening will come, and you must suffer."

"Other people have become great artists without great experience," she persisted.

"Were they New Englanders? Were reserve and self-restraint the watchwords of their natures? You, of all women I know, were born and nurtured amidst ice-fields and granite. Your real nature has the depth and stillness and mystery of the northern

night. You have given me glimpses of it now and then, but as a rule it is as difficult for you to express real self as it is for any man. When ice-fields melt, the floods are so great that nothing can stand before them; but in the meantime don't be surprised that you cannot express yourself in *arie* and ballads."

Winifred thought deeply, with troubled brows.

"But I am not convinced," she said.

"I suppose not. You think I am talking fancifully. Please remember that I am a hard-headed lawyer; facts and logic are my livelihood, so when I choose to come down, or up, whichever you will, to metaphor, I do not do so without reason, and am entitled to respect. You will know that I am right some day."

Dan's visit was a short one, but he made the best of it. Madame Alberto obligingly took to her bed with a cold, and singing lessons were suspended.

"Why didn't Mr. Garrison come with you? I think he said something to Edith about joining us again this summer," asked Winifred once.

Dan looked at her suddenly. "Did he, though?" he exclaimed. "He said nothing to me of it. Were they especially good friends last year?"

"I never noticed," said Winifred. "Yes, they

were together a good deal; but I don't think it meant anything."

"I am not sure of that," said Dan. "In the dim ages before Walter saw the light of this planet, a woman must have buckled on his soul's armor. He has been unconsciously hunting for her all his life, and when he looks at your sister there is something in his eyes which makes me think that he has found her now!"

"I never noticed it," said Winifred again.

On the last day of his stay Dan became restive and hard to please.

"Who is that Austrian beast on the other side of the street?" he asked. "I don't like the way he looks at you. He has passed your house several times."

Winifred colored angrily. "It must be von Reidnitz," she said.

"And who is von Reidnitz?"

"One of Madame's pupils."

"Why does he look at you?"

"I can't imagine — can you?"

"Win, that man has annoyed you."

"A little. Dan, don't look so." There was a furious gleam in his eyes.

"The creature is following us; wait for me here."

"Don't, don't — what are you going to do?"

He strode back to von Reidnitz, and after a few words returned to Winifred with a slightly relieved countenance.

"What did you say?"

"I told him that if I heard of his troubling you again I should be unable to deny myself the pleasure of dropping him into the lake."

She laughed. "I am glad you said it; but he is n't worth much disturbance."

Rage was still in Dan's eyes.

"To think that you — you — should subject yourself to things of this kind."

"But they don't hurt me."

He muttered something about a stain on a lily. Winifred raised her head proudly. "This stage life is hell," he went on. "A woman can't go through it and"—

"Stop, Dan!" Her clear eyes met his without a tremor, and his anger fell.

"I think I am a little ashamed of you," she said.

"You don't understand," he protested helplessly.

"Yes, I do. It is you who do not understand. No soul is moved by what it does not possess, and I — I thought you knew me better, Dan."

He was silent. Surely the woman who dared

speak so with clear, unfaltering eyes raised to his, was worthy of a lifetime's love and reverence.

For a longer time than usual they walked in silence. Then he made her talk of herself, as he was never tired of doing; but the details of her life made him frown.

"It all seems unworthy of you, somehow," he protested. "Even the music you sing is trash" —

"The art with which I sing it is not trash," she interrupted.

"Even the music is trash, and you know it, but go on because you win admiration. And how long do you think admiration is going to satisfy you? Do you think you can starve your heart and your brain forever? All this excitement and bidding for adulation is cheapening; it will cheapen even you in the end. Turn off the gas, Win; turn off the gas, and let the stars shine."

"If you think me capable of all this worthlessness," said Win, "why do you — why do you" —

"Why do I love you?"

"Yes."

"Primarily because you are you, I suppose."

"That is no reason."

"It is enough for me," he said doggedly; and then added, half smiling, "I suppose I love you for the possibilities of that empty heart and brain."

Winifred's eyes were mischievous.

"I am not sure that I like being loved for my possibilities," she said.

Twilight found them at a remote Gasthaus high among the mountains. Winifred sat on the terrace, idly watching the clouds trail their gray edges over silent hills, while Dan went to make inquiries as to their whereabouts. His words and tones floated through her consciousness, and in this quiet hour she could stand face to face with her soul, and know, as in the depths of her being she always knew, that he was right.

He loomed up before her suddenly, looking somewhat grim through the dusk.

"We must take a carriage back," he said. "And while they are tackling you had better come in and have something warm to drink. It will be cold, driving."

In a dimly lighted room she sipped coffee, and watched him play with a tiny crippled boy, who seemed to belong to the inn. The child had preternaturally large eyes, grown grave through that most pitiful of all things in the world, childish pain. At first he was chary of accepting this very tall stranger's advances; but Dan's manner with children was not to be resisted, and very soon he lifted the frail little form from its chair, and the child

nestled confidingly into arms at once so gentle and so strong. Before the time came to go, Dan had brought a light to the wan face, and uncertain childish laughter echoed through the room.

Winifred left her coffee half finished.

"What is it?" he asked, looking down into serious eyes while he fastened her cloak.

"You make me ashamed, Dan," she said very low.

"Ashamed — you?"

"Yes. I could not have spoken to, or touched that child as you did. You teach tenderness to me — you, a man, and I am ashamed. How did you learn it?"

"Through loving you."

For a moment they stood so in the dim room, her eyes meeting and questioning his. Then they went out into the night, and very silently drove down through the cool, damp darkness. There was a sound of running streams, and the air was pungent with the odor of pine and balsam. The great mountain loomed black against a sky brightened by the rising moon, and over the still, dark world mists trailed and lingered caressingly.

Winifred leaned back, her face turned to the stars. In her eyes was something of awe and of wonder. Dan bent once and put his coat about

her, and his silent action changed the mental atmosphere. The silence between them became electric with unuttered words.

"'Ye have taught my lips one single speech, and a thousand silences,'" he said to her at last. "I know you best in your silent moments, Win."

She turned towards him, and her eyes met his.

"You are wondering if you will tell me that the silences are all mine," he continued. "You need n't; for I know it."

Then for another time they drove under the remote, solemn stars, without words passing between them.

Before long the moon floated up from behind the mountain, drowning the stars, and flooding the valley with mystic light. The mists passed away from the earth, and many lights twinkled from the village beneath.

"We are almost there," said Win.

"We are almost there," he repeated. "And I am going away to-morrow."

The driver was sleepy. He nodded on his seat, and the horses jogged lazily through a silent village street, and out into the open fields again.

"Win!" His eyes, dark and stern, claimed hers. "How many more times am I to come and go, before you go with me?"

Winifred moved restlessly. "I have never given you the right to say I would some day go with you."

"I have taken the right."

She met his eyes bravely.

"I do not love you — I do not know that I ever shall."

"But I know. You may try the life you have chosen, but you cannot starve your brain or silence your heart forever. You will reap as you have sown, but the harvest will be bitter, and then I shall claim you by the right and might of my love." His face, stern with passion, was close to hers. "Winifred, Winifred, how long are you going to keep me waiting?"

Something moved within her as a sleeper moves in his dream. His words and tones rang with conquering manhood.

"Win, I love you! I love you! I love you! Sooner or later you will leave all and come to me. How long are you going to keep me waiting? God help me — how I love you!" He took her into his arms, and though she would have struggled against the strange compelling power of his pleading, she lay almost passive in his clasp.

"Dan, I can't — I can't — I am not ready — yet," she whispered.

Chapter V

DAN'S PATH IS CHOSEN FOR HIM

FOR several days after Dan's departure Winifred was unusually silent. Edith shrewdly suspected that he had been troublesome the night of the drive, for Winifred had come in alone, looking pale and shaken out of her habitually careless gayety, and Dan had not appeared to say good-by the next morning. It was several days before Edith found courage to mention his name.

"Dan was looking older," she remarked one morning, tentatively.

"That is nonsense," answered Winifred with some sharpness. "He is only thirty-one."

"I only said he looked older — not old. I suppose you will allow that even I look older than when I was eighteen."

"He looked tired. I think he is working too hard," admitted Winifred.

Edith hesitated. "Did he ever say anything about Mr. Garrison?" she asked, with every appearance of indifference.

"I must write him not to work so hard," said Winifred, ignoring her sister's remark. "He certainly has changed in some way. I noticed it at once. The lines in his face have worn deeper; but more with strength than with years, I think."

In the mean time, Dan was making the best of the long journey to Paris. Sunk in the dark corner of a compartment, he thought of Winifred, her vividness, her gallant, joyous bearing, and more than all he thought of the hints of deep and perfect womanhood he caught now and then in her eyes and voice. At Paris, he found a letter from her, written the day after his departure.

"I lay awake nearly an hour last night, worrying," she wrote. Dan smiled, remembering the entire nights he had lain awake thinking of her. "And this morning, I am more than ever troubled for fear that you have taken false meaning from my last words. You wrung them from me, for I am not altogether a stone, and I don't believe the woman lives whom you could not move. I was at high pressure, almost breaking pressure, when I spoke them. Under the stars it is easy to believe in shadows. This morning, in broad, positive daylight, I see myself as I am. It is no use, Dan. Your love for me is the greatest honor in my life, but I can't live up to it or satisfy it. You love me

partly for what is in yourself, partly for what I am not. I can't change — I don't wish to. I am young, happy, successful. You tell me of mysteries beyond my horizon line. I do not believe in them. You tell me the flood tide of a woman's life reflects the lives of others, and I do not wish to believe it. I want life! life! life! for myself, — for myself, Dan. It is *my* hands that feel, *my* eyes that see; what do I know of others? It is *I* that enjoy, or suffer, or struggle, not somebody else. I want all of life there is to be had, every drop and dreg, and I want it for myself. Please understand, once for all, Dan, I want it for myself.

"Don't think I am unkind to speak so strongly. The kindest thing of all would be for me to stop our friendship; but I can't do it, partly because you will not yield, partly because I am selfish, and your friendship is the only one in the world that means anything to me."

Dan buttoned this discouraging epistle under his breast pocket, and smiled a smile of quiet mastery. He did not answer her at length.

"Dear child, don't trouble yourself about it," he wrote. "Your letter makes me feel how young you are, and I am sad when I think of what must come to you before your plucky spirit will bend. We are all tried by flood and fire sooner or later, and

the misfortune is generally fitted to the size of the soul that knows it."

During the voyage home Dan thought constantly of how young she was, how much younger than himself, though there were only seven years between them. He wondered, and then laughed at himself for wondering, if an odd tired feeling in his head and eyes meant that he was growing old, or was only overworked. Certainly he found the quiet of an Atlantic voyage infinitely refreshing, and went back to Garrison and his winter quarters in good spirits.

The first evening was cold, and both men sat smoking over a wood fire. They talked with a certain indifference of their vacations, which had been spent in different parts of Europe.

"Did you finally get to the Tyrol?" asked Walter.

His friend glanced at him keenly. "Yes. Why would n't you go with me?"

Walter leaned over and knocked the ashes out of his pipe. Some moments elapsed before he said very slowly: —

"It seemed best not — this time."

"I wondered if that were the reason."

"That was the reason," he answered quietly.

For a little while the two men smoked in silence.

They understood one another, and being men, words were superfluous. Dan spoke first.

"I suppose it is largely a question of money?"

"It must be entirely a question of money before it can be a question of — her."

Again it did not seem necessary for Dan to say that he agreed with him.

"How much are you making now?" he asked.

"A bare eight hundred."

After another pause Dan rose with a short laugh. "Providence needs guiding," he said. "I make more than I can spend, and have no use for it."

With the beginning of winter Walter Garrison went back to his business and plodded on doggedly after his usual fashion. He watched with an aching heart for advancement which never came.

Dan's season began brilliantly. He was growing to be feared by some, admired by many, loved by a few. In no case was he ignored. Resolutely and confidently did he walk the road he had chosen. With unflinching eyes did he look into the years to come, audaciously challenging their power to give him other than what he wished. He feared nothing, believing that a man holds his success in the hollow of his hand, and having conquered so much, it was easy to believe that the woman with-

out whom all else must be as nothing would some day be his also.

It was almost imperceptibly that he first came to a consciousness of unusual effort in his work. Night hours especially were exhausting to his eyes and brain.

"Am I ill, or growing old?" he asked himself indignantly.

One night, Walter came in from the theatre about eleven, to find the light out in the study and Dan smoking by the fire.

"What on earth are you loafing for?" he asked him, turning up the gas.

Dan rose impatiently. "I can't seem to manage night hours," he said. "There 's something wrong with my head. I think it 's neuralgia."

"Perhaps it 's astigmatism," suggested Garrison. "Why not consult an oculist?"

"Bah! There 's nothing wrong with my eyes, and I don't like oculists. My uncle went blind when I was a boy and drowned himself in a mill-pond. I used to think the oculist had something to do with it, and the memory of the man's face frightened me more than tales of ghosts carrying their heads in their hands."

"You don't look overworked," said Garrison, reverting to the original point.

"I am not overworked. I never felt better in my life."

"Sometimes a pair of glasses is all one needs for pain in the head," he persisted quietly.

"Glasses!" Dan laughed contemptuously. "No, there 's nothing wrong; if I am not all right soon I 'll get a prescription for neuralgia."

For awhile Walter heard no more of the matter. He noticed that Dan had a worn look unusual to him, and that his temper was increasingly short, but he made no further allusion to his trouble, knowing that what Dan chose to say he would say without being questioned.

The evening work went on as before, till one night when Walter was disturbed by a constant tramp of heavy footsteps in the study.

"What the devil are you up to?" he called sleepily.

"I am up to nothing," answered Dan's voice with uncalled-for gruffness.

"Then keep quiet; other people want to sleep if you don't."

After that he remembered nothing till he met Howard in the morning.

"What in the name of reason were you doing last night?" he asked.

"I could n't sleep," answered Dan; "there was

a hideous pain in my head which had to be walked into submission."

Walter looked at him narrowly and saw that he did not look right.

"How long has this been going on?" he asked.

"A lifetime, it seems. It began last winter."

"Better go to the doctor."

"I mean to. What are Randolph's hours?"

"From two to four, I think. So it is to be an oculist after all?"

"Yes; the trouble is with my eyes. I 've known that all along."

After breakfast he felt sufficiently fortified to laugh at pains and doctors.

"Meet me at the club for luncheon. I don't believe I 'll go to the doctor after all," he called to Walter, and went his way down town, walking vigorously through the cold.

Walter watched his friend tramping down the hill. "What a splendid specimen of manhood he is!" he thought; "all the same I don't like his looks."

During the morning Dan looked in at Garrison's office.

"Don't expect me for luncheon. I am going to Randolph's and may be kept hours."

"Got the jumps again?" queried Walter.

Dan nodded and disappeared.

Walter got home early. He had been haunted by the possibility of Dan's being obliged to knock off work. "He won't take easily to limitations," he thought, as he opened the study door. It was not too dark to see that Dan sat alone, without the comfort of pipe or fire.

"Well, what's the verdict?" Walter asked with an attempt at cheer which felt oddly unnatural. "You don't look festive; let's have a light."

Dan winced as the gas flared up.

"You damn fool, can't you see you're putting my eyes out?" he cried savagely.

Walter paused in amazement, the lighted match still in his hand. He saw that Dan's face was gray and running with perspiration. "For God's sake, man, what's the matter?" he asked.

"I am going blind," said Dan.

"Blind — you" — Walter repeated the words dully. He had a sense of being confronted with something his imagination could not grasp.

Dan rose heavily and with a shaking hand poured himself out a glass of whiskey. "I've taken enough of this stuff to give me D. T.'s," he said, "but I can't even get confused."

"I guess you've had all you want now," said Walter, removing a nearly empty bottle to the side-

board. Then he felt the need of sitting down. He looked at Dan, and Dan stared back at him with haggard eyes in which there was deadly fear.

"You say you are going to be — blind?"

Dan nodded. "That 's it. My sight may not hold out through the year. What do you think of it?" he asked grimly.

Walter dropped his head in his hands.

"My God!" he said.

"Yes, I know. I 've been doing that all the afternoon, and it 's no use." Dan kicked a chair out of the way and began pacing the room. "It 's hell, thunder, fire, and all the devils," he went on, "but there 's no escape."

"Did n't the doctor give hope?"

"None. I was a doomed man six months ago. It 's my uncle's trouble, and I thought I could choose my own life! The Fates must find a good deal to laugh at, if they have any sense of humor."

Walter did not answer. As yet he loved no woman as he loved Dan Howard. There was a silence, and then Dan stood above him laughing.

"You look as if you were going blind yourself, old boy," he said. "Come, buck up. I 'll be a man till the light goes, and then you can make it all right by giving me a knock on the head."

"Stop talking that rot," said Walter, as he forced Dan into a chair. "And don't take any more whiskey — we need clear heads."

Dan tried to square his shoulders. "I am not going to funk, Wally. I shall come round in a day or so; only when a man has received a blow between the eyes he can't see straight right off. You'll allow that to be left in the dark is not cheering."

He spoke with laboring breath, and drops of perspiration stood on his forehead.

"I am no coward," he said, "but to be blind — not to know noon from midnight — to become abject, helpless, pitiable — to be blind — My God — I am afraid."

Chapter VI

REALIZATION

IF there is help in the mind of any man, in the wisdom of the ages, or in the earth or in the heavens, I am going to find it," said Dan a few days later. He spoke in a voice that grated, and the lines in his face were deep and harsh. Walter stood opposite.

"The greatest oculist in the world doesn't practice any more," he said with dreary hopelessness.

"Where is he?" asked Dan.

"San Francisco."

Dan consulted a time-table."

"I can leave to-morrow morning."

"But he won't see you."

"Can you get me his address?"

"Randolph has it. But what's the use? He won't see you," Walter persisted, with dull obstinacy.

"If you say that again I'll throw you out of the window. He will have to see me."

A valise was packed in feverish haste while Walter looked on.

"What are you loafing round here for?" Dan inquired at last, exasperated by his friend's inarticulate sympathy.

"There is nothing going on at the office."

"I don't believe it." Dan was wrestling with shirtstuds and an over-stiff collar.

"I know I am not much good," said Walter, "but you can use me to blow off steam on."

If Dan was touched he did not show it.

"I could n't read the quotations of the stock exchange this morning," he remarked a little later, and then paused with lowering brows. "The doctor won't fix a time limit," he continued. "It may come soon."

"Don't you want me to go with you?" Walter asked eagerly.

"Thank you, I don't need a keeper yet." Dan looked at his friend with ill-concealed ferocity. "Damn it all, Walter, what do you mean by that? Do you expect me to go blind on the journey?"

"No, but you just said" —

"Never mind what I said, and keep your confounded croaking to yourself." Dan sat down for a moment, and wiped his forehead with an unsteady hand. Then out of a drawer he took a

heavy pistol and balanced it in his hand. "If one were a coward, how simple the way out of the fight would be!" he observed.

"But you are not a coward."

"It would be interesting to find out." He moved toward his valise.

"You are not going to take it with you!"

"Your voice is anxious, Wally; that settles it; the pistol goes."

Walter's long-suffering patience gave way.

"Are you a child, to indulge in such bravado?" he cried. "Give that infernal thing to me."

"Take your hand away or it will go hard with you." There was a moment's struggle, while the men breathed heavily; then Dan stowed the pistol away in his bag.

"The bravado amuses me," he said quietly. "It's not my fault if your sense of humor is defective."

A few minutes before the Chicago express left the city, Walter hurried through the car in search of Dan. "I have just met Randolph," he explained. "He did n't approve of your going west — said the journey would be bad, and told me you must n't read a word or look out of the window overmuch, and guard, above all, against glare

from the snow. He suggested a dark corner of the car, or blue glasses."

Dan laughed shortly. "Are we men, or slaves?" he said. "And how am I to get the glasses at this hour?"

"I had time to buy them as I came along." Walter handed over his purchase, which Dan surveyed with a twisted smile.

"I don't like their looks," he said, "but it was good of you to get them, Wally. I have been a brute these last days, but — Well, the fight is about as hot as I can stand it."

"I know it, old man. Trample on me all you want, if it relieves you. God knows I would" — The sentence was finished by a silent hand grip. "But I should be happier if you had n't taken the pistol," he added.

"You will find it on the smoking-table when you get home," said Dan. "I left it as a legacy in case I got smashed up. You blessed old idiot, what did you think I was taking it for?"

"To torment me, I suppose."

"Exactly; but you looked so superlatively miserable about it that I had n't the heart — only I am sorry you thought I was going to funk."

The journey seemed to Dan a desperate run for the light, a race in which every hour increased the

chance of loss. In the darkness and solitude of a private room he sat with his head in his hands trying to think clearly. But visions of Winifred's face confused him, and from the dread and horror of his probable future there was no escape. After a night in which broken sleep brought no forgetfulness, it came to him that the dark was no longer bearable, and as he must undoubtedly go blind in spite of the San Francisco doctor, it would be well to see while he might. So he pushed up the curtain and took cognizance of men and things. To his tortured consciousness the world assumed the qualities of nightmare. Chicago seemed a mighty and a hideous city, where an eager life roared in cañon-like depths, and huge buildings loomed dark and ominous against the sky. The train, shrieking, quivering, panting as if goaded by intolerable fear, rushed from the cavernous station into the monotony of farms and grainfields. Then came more thoughts of Winifred, more visions of the future. The miles were hemispheres, the hours years. Assuredly the doctor would die before he could be reached, and every moment brought increasing certainty of blindness. He tried to imagine how it would be, and when the realization assumed a certain degree of distinctness, the perspiration

would break out on him and his hands shake like a woman's.

The next day the Missouri River was passed, but the Pacific coast seemed as distant as ever. Now he was in the prairies, and with breathless haste the train sped onward through a level, colorless world, where there was neither wind nor sun, nor tree nor stream, where life was hushed and strife was futile, and anguish would be lost. At intervals of a hundred miles or so, some houses huddled together in fear of the loneliness.

All that afternoon Dan thought of Winifred and what might have been.

After dark the cold became intense, and through wind and snow and fitful moonlight, two gasping, struggling engines drew the train up the Rocky Mountains. Dan slept brokenly, oppressed by a sense of gigantic effort in his progress, which decreased chances of salvation. But assuredly Winifred would come before the end. At last he felt her hand, and heard her voice saying, "Never mind the dark, Dan, I shall always be here."

The morning light showed him the summit of the Rockies, — a strange, desolate spot, without grandeur or beauty, where huge rocks, hideous, naked, distorted, loomed against the sky. Dan

looked with hatred and dread in his heart. Then came the land of the sage-brush, the desert, a spot forsaken by God and man; a gaunt, scarred, desolate world, arid and parched; a dead world, without shadow, or voice, or breath. In these brown, echoless distances, in this huge desolation, Dan felt the numbness of despair. The day was an eternity, the horizons slipped away like grains of sand in an hourglass, and nothing mattered much save the quantity of sage-brush. The thought of their millions made him giddy; he felt there could be no escape from them, they would be before his eyes long after the sight of men's faces had gone forever. If Winifred were here, — but Winifred must go with the light. The voice of a man outside his door complaining of hunger brought him to the realization that his fancies were those of a diseased brain. As no dream could be worse than his reality, so madness might be a relief; but his soul sent up a passionate prayer that he might never know such relief, whatever his sufferings, or however many his years.

The next morning he remembered with a sense of wonder that this was the last day of his journey, and courage, if not hope, returned. The desert lay behind; his way was upwards through the Sierra Nevada, where there was luxuriant

nature and dazzling beauty. There were shouting mountain torrents, regal snow-burdened evergreens; over all was a cloudless sky, and in all, vigor and joy. During a pause in the ascent he stood alone beside his car. In front of him a valley led the eye away to a distance of more mountains, more snow and pines. It seemed eternal; a beautiful, triumphant world, dazzling and virginal as on the first day of its creation. Then Dan wondered what man had done to deserve so glorious a heritage, and drew in breaths that were deep and strong with the pride of being. Surely failure was but a word, and darkness a dream. Then he swayed suddenly, caught by swift, intolerable pain, and gray fog rolled between him and the brightness. The mountains were no more, and the car was a dark indistinct mass. With difficulty he made his way to it, and by a fortunate chance stumbled into his own compartment; his face was gray with dread, and his hands shook, but he sat down very quietly — to wait.

"When is this fog going to lift?" he said. "Perhaps it won't lift. My God! I wish Wally were here."

After a while daylight came back to him, and a tolerable clearness of vision; but he kept the curtain drawn, and looked no more on the snow. In

future the bright worlds, the worlds of triumph and freedom, were not for him.

The final arrival in San Francisco was not till late that night, and the next morning a cab dropped him at the door of the great specialist, Dr. Davage. As was to have been expected, the servant refused him admittance. "The doctor never receives strangers," the man told him, and was about to shut the door. Dan presented his card and a letter of introduction, receiving in return an assurance that they would be delivered in the course of the day, but that at present the doctor was having his morning smoke on the back piazza, where disturbing him would be out of the question. Dan considered a moment before the closed door.

"I don't see very well, but I think I can trust myself to find the back piazza," he told himself.

Dr. Davage sat alone, enjoying a pipe, a good digestion, and the view. His eye swept beyond the carefully kept garden, over the housetops to the gleaming waters of the bay, and the mountains beyond. He had a lazy sense of vast ownership, and knew a distinct satisfaction that no one was present to share his delights. Suddenly his privacy was broken by a footfall on the gravel, and a figure came between himself and the sun.

"What the devil" — he began, and then paused in amazement, as a man, gaunt-featured and haggard-eyed, stumbled up the steps.

"You are Dr. Davage?" said this man in the voice of an autocrat.

"The same. May I inquire the cause of this — er" —

"I am losing my eyesight; I am half blind already, and I have come to see if you can save me."

"Ah. I shall dismiss my servant to-morrow. How is it he allowed you to" —

"He did not allow me; I came. When can you give me an appointment?"

"Not so fast, my friend. I see that you are a gentleman, and as such you must be aware of having taken an unwarrantable liberty."

"Just now I have no time to be a gentleman."

"Ah," said the doctor again. "Won't you sit down, Mr." —

"Howard."

"The name is familiar. I have met you before."

"The fact is immaterial. Will you see me to-day?"

The doctor knocked the ashes from his pipe. "I practice no longer," he said.

"I ask you to make an exception in my favor. You may name your price."

"My dear sir," — a movement of the hands suggested superiority to dollars and cents, — "pray spare me the pain of repeated denial. I remember now where I have seen you, and you should have good reason to remember my face. You were the opposing counsel in the case of Hoyt versus Davage, and you won by a rather clever argument, I remember. As a result I was some thousands out of pocket. I suppose you had forgotten this little circumstance when you came to me today."

"I had forgotten, but recollection would not have prevented my coming."

"Ah, this becomes interesting. I wonder what blindness will make of you."

"You will see me, doctor?"

"Certainly not." Simultaneously the men rose and faced each other. The doctor was quiet and cool. Dan breathed heavily. He realized that in this man of whims he had met a will equal to his own.

To himself the doctor said, "I like his damned audacity." Aloud he added, "Rest is a question of life and death to me."

"Sight is a question of more than life or death

to me. You can't condemn a man to blindness for the sake of a whim."

"I wish you a very good morning, Mr. Howard."

Then Dan's pride gave way.

"I see less every day," he said hoarsely. "For God's sake, give me a chance."

Doctor Davage smiled, and Dan turned away heavily.

"Stop one moment," said Davage. "When a man like you takes to begging, he must be listened to. Come into the house, and I will see what can be done for you."

Without a word, Dan turned and followed him, wondering if awakening pity rather than use of power was to be his weapon of the future, as it had been of to-day.

"Sit down there — no, with your back to the light; the glare annoys you, I see. You will have to wait while I prepare my apparatus, which is not on tap for every one."

There was only kindness in the doctor's voice now. He talked briskly while polishing a reflecting mirror.

"I am not entirely a brute," he continued, "but I have as many whims as a schoolgirl, and it amuses me to startle people by showing them off; when a man forces me to meet him under the crust

as you have done, I like him. I like you, and hope to be able to save those eyes. Have you confidence in me?"

Dan smiled wearily. "I have no especial respect for whims," he said, "but there must be something big about you or you could not have stood against my will as you did."

"Ah!" The doctor looked up with a twinkle in his eyes. "The arrogance of expecting me to do anything for you after you had made me pay those thousands. Oh, I owed them — I owed them, all right. I hope you realize that I did not yield under your will to-day."

"No; you were sorry for me."

"Well, well — I might have spared your pride that admission; but I owed it to my vanity." Then with a complete change of countenance, "I am ready for you now, Mr. Howard; sit here, if you please."

The little man suddenly became a great specialist. He surveyed his patient with a settling of brow and lip that changed his face oddly.

"Now then — what 's your trouble?"

Dan told him, and there was a moment's pause.

"That is bad," said the doctor slowly. "The end of such a trouble is usually a foregone conclusion. We shall see. Your pulse is not steady."

"I should like to have the examination over as soon as possible, if you please."

"Move forward — so."

Under the rays of the reflector, Dan was dazzled and tortured almost to unconsciousness. There was a pause, and then —

"The case is entirely hopeless," said the doctor.

Dan sat silent, with bowed head. He did not speak at once.

"There are certain things I want to do," he said at last. "How long a time do you give me?"

"With reasonable precautions you are safe for several months yet."

"There will be time to see Win again," he thought. Aloud he continued, "I see badly to-day after a strain I had yesterday, above the snow-line of the Sierra. Can you tell me if the results are likely to be permanent? Shall I be better before" —

"Before you are worse? yes, I should think it probable."

"Thank you; I will go now. You have been very good. For how much am I in your debt?"

"You owe me a few thousands or so; but not for this occasion. I no longer practice professionally. This is a positive rule. You must submit to taking my advice as a gift, Mr. Howard."

The point seemed to Dan unworthy of consideration. He rose and walked unsteadily toward the door.

The doctor was quiet and grave. "I should be glad to have you stay longer," he said. "Do you feel equal to the glare yet?"

Dan winced at the sunlight. "I think it will be all right," he said. "I must go. There are things to do."

Win was to be seen, of course, and there were certain business matters he alone could wind up. His mind was painfully clear. For a moment he paused on the veranda steps, realizing that the world was good to look upon.

Dr. Davage saw and understood. "You care especially for this sort of thing?" he asked.

"One might give it up, if that were all."

Davage nodded. "I know; it is the putting out of hands for help to women and children."

A spasm crossed Dan's lips.

"Why submit to it?" asked the doctor. "There 's a way out."

"It 's too much like turning a back to the enemy."

"Nonsense! It is merely a question of choice. You take the easy road instead of the difficult. What will life hold for you? I should not think

you were the man to submit to the insolence of a fate that never asks permission."

"I shall put it through somehow," answered Dan.

Davage held out his hand. "I like you, Howard," he said. "I knew your father; he was a good fighter; but you are a bigger man than he. If you will allow me to say so, I am sorry for you. I shall hope to see you again."

"I suppose I cannot hope for the same pleasure," said Dan with a faint smile.

"I fear not. I shall hardly go east before a year or two, and by that time you can scarcely expect" —

"I suppose not. Good-morning, doctor."

On the journey home there were no more weak-minded fancies about dead worlds and an eternity of sage-brush. Behind closely drawn curtains Dan sat weighing the future with a pitilessly clear brain, that spared him the knowledge of no single bitterness.

Chapter VII

ACCEPTANCE

WALTER sat alone, with an account of the stock market lying untouched on his knees. The drop in sugar, the depression in railway bonds, and the tightness of money were ephemeral matters, unworthy of consideration. Dan might, and probably would, go blind. Beyond this fact Walter's mind refused to go. Hour by hour the realization of all blindness would mean deepened in his consciousness, and the horror and pity of it grew upon him. Suddenly Dan stood in the doorway.

Neither of the men spoke. Walter's eyes questioned hungrily, and Dan's face answered. On the table lay a large pile of unopened letters, with a bulky envelope addressed in Winifred's handwriting lying conspicuously near the top. He put this in his pocket, and tossed the others aside.

"I can't waste my eyes on those things," he said, and flung himself wearily into a chair.

Walter broke the silence. "You saw the doctor?"

"Yes."

Dan stared into gathering shadows.

"There 's no hope," he continued. "Life is a lost game for me."

"How soon?" Walter's lips were dry.

"A breathing space."

"A year?"

"A few months. Oblige me by not looking at me that way again while I can see you."

He spoke with subdued ferocity; for in Walter's eyes he could take the measure of his own future.

There was a pause, and then Walter rose to shade the lamp which shone in Dan's eyes. The latter looked up.

"Thank you, Wally," he said.

"What are you going to do?" asked Walter.

"I am going to Europe, and then I am going blind, and then after a century or so, I am going to die."

"And during the 'century or so'?"

"I shall keep up my profession. I suppose that is what you want to know."

"It can be done?"

"It must be done. I shall get a secretary, pay him extra for being sworn at, and work him like a

dog. It 's either work or something worse than madness or death."

"You say you are going to Europe?"

"There 's a famous specialist in Paris," Dan said briefly. Then he rose and stood with his back to the fire. "There 's another point," he began. "When my eyes go, you must move out — find lodgings for yourself."

"Can you give me any reason why I should?"

"Certainly. I don't choose to have you bothering about me while you might be at work, or with the fellows."

"That 's rot — I am not going," said Walter.

"If you don't, I shall, and I would rather live on here, because I know the place and could find things in the dark."

"I am not going," repeated Walter obstinately. "Nor are you. You and I have always been" — He paused.

"Yes, I know all that, and I know you, and so — we 'll part company, please. My darkness is my own. I don't want any one to share it."

Walter puffed at his pipe, and settled himself more deeply in the armchair.

"How do you expect to get rid of me?" he asked. "I am wondering how I should get rid of you in a like circumstance."

"I would go to the other end of the world to escape from a man who could n't see to find his collar button. However, your consent does n't matter. If you can't go with it, you must go without it."

That night he read Winifred's letter. She wrote jubilantly of her final engagement to sing in the Paris Opera House, and filled pages with accounts of her hopes and fears. Dan read with pain and some difficulty. He must tell her to write with darker ink and on less transparent paper, and then he laid his head down on the letter with an inarticulate moan. It was doubtful if he ever read more of her writing; doubtful also if he could see her face by the time he arrived in Paris.

During the next few days a secretary was chosen on trial.

"He has n't the eyes and lips that blab, and he 's clever," Dan decided after a few days' work with a slight, pale boy. "Poor little devil, he has a threadbare coat, and looks hungry."

Gazing down at the very small secretary, he felt a strong disinclination to confess his own coming weakness.

"Stirling, how would you like to enter my office and stay there subject to advancement?" he asked one evening, suddenly.

Stirling looked up at the prominent lawyer.

"*Your* office, sir?" he said, a hungry eagerness in his usually quiet eyes.

"That 's what I said."

There were awe, admiration, and reverence in Stirling's face. Dan saw this, and swallowed hard.

"The fact is," he said, bracing his broad shoulders, "the fact is I 'm losing my eyesight. I don't expect it to last me through the year. I should wish you to be eyes for me. It will be dog's work, and I can't afford to consider your strength. If you can't do the work, some one else can. I shall require something else besides law work. You would have to take me down town and back every day, besides being constantly with me. Do you know anything about blind people?"

"No, sir."

"No more do I, but we can both learn. How will it be about vacations? Shall you be wanting leave every few months? Because I can't spare you."

"I think that will be all right."

"You hesitate — what is it? Family? or sweetheart?"

"I have a mother," answered Stirling.

"Is she old, or ill?"

"She is both."

"Ah, that is bad. Where is she?"

"In New York State."

"I see, and you will want to be with her constantly. Then I am afraid we can't arrange it."

"I don't think she or I will be unreasonable." Stirling spoke eagerly. "I want to work with you," he added.

Dan considered. "You can't desert a mother," he said. "I never had one myself, but I always thought they must be more or less desirable articles."

Stirling looked up quickly, whereat Dan smiled. "He lacks humor," he thought, "and is shocked at my calling a mother a desirable article; but he is not afraid to show it, so I like him."

"Could n't you bring your mother here, or near here?" he suggested.

"That would depend on my salary," said the boy frankly.

"Of course. Considering the peculiar circumstances, — I mean personal attendance and the rest of it, — I will give you twenty-five hundred a year. You must be extravagant if you can't support yourself, and bring your mother wherever you like, on that. Are you an only son?"

"Yes, sir; but I have a sister."

"Then you don't need to go away often. Think it over, and let me know."

"I don't require to think it over, sir. I can say now that I shall be glad, I shall be proud, to take the situation."

With immense pity in his eyes the little secretary looked up at the big man. Dan winced, and felt a sudden desire to strangle some one.

After a short pause he spoke again. "All right," he said. "Only don't expect to have an easy time, for I shall work you like a dog; nor a good time, for I don't expect to be especially cheerful at first."

"I fear neither the one nor the other," said Stirling.

"That 's right, and spoken like a man. I think we shall rub along all right. I am not often wrong in reading faces. Of course our agreement is a secret until — it can't be a secret any longer."

"What an ass I am to stick at the word!" Dan added to himself.

Stirling hesitated, with his hand on the door knob.

"Can you tell me how long it will be before" —

"Before I go blind?" finished Dan, swallowing hard. "It will be some time within the year. What is that to you?"

"I asked because I had better go to my mother and make arrangements for moving her before you absolutely need me."

"I foresee the mother is to be a bone of contention. You can go next week while I am in Europe, and stay till I come back. If I get into trouble while I am away, I shall cable you to meet me at the steamer on her arrival in Boston. What is it now?" For Stirling still lingered.

"I wish" — he began hesitatingly, "I wish I could say or do something to express" —

"Yes, yes, I understand all that," interrupted Dan hastily. "Never mind. You had better go now."

After the door had closed, Dan remained standing.

"The boy is a sensitive little animal," he reflected. "It 's a pity he has no humor, but otherwise he is clever enough, and I only want his eyes. He is the kind to die for his principles; people without humor usually are, and his heart is all right. I could tell that by the way he looked at me." Dan set his teeth. "Fancy a little beggar like that looking at me so."

During the few days that passed before the sailing of his steamer, Dan marshaled the forces of his soul and fought a good fight. He was a man of

arrogant power, who faced a life of pitiable dependence, and would not run away; but such battles are not waged for nothing, and in his face something of the barbaric strength and savagery of elemental man were showing through the veneer of civilization.

On the day of his final conversation with Stirling he walked alone on one of the great bridges north of the city. He walked slowly, with massive brows lowered over sombre, brooding eyes, and suddenly he met Kate Randolph.

She was holding out her hand, and reluctantly he brought his eyes and thoughts down to her.

Under the toque of gray fur and violets, Kate's upturned face looked pale and tense.

"Dan, what did the doctor in San Francisco say?" she asked him.

He bent his brows angrily. "What do you mean, Kate?"

"I know all about it." She drew in her breath quickly. "Don't look at me so, Dan. Papa didn't tell — but" —

"Go on!"

"It was n't papa's fault" — she spoke in a hard voice. "I saw you come out of his office — you didn't notice me — and your face made me afraid, so I asked papa if anything was wrong; he

would n't tell me. The next day you came again. and I crept downstairs and listened, Dan. I knelt by the keyhole for half an hour — and I heard every word."

He looked at her in silence, and she saw that his contempt was greater than his anger.

"I had to do it, Dan," she said. "I had to do it. What did the San Francisco doctor say?"

He turned on his heel with a short laugh. He had wished to meet the world of men on equal terms as long as he could, and now his last foothold was gone. As for this girl, she was only one of the insects who carry poison.

"Dan." The little face looked old. "Dan, do you think I am going to tell?"

"Is n't that what you listened for?"

The intense light in her eyes wavered like a flame in the wind. "How can I make you believe me?" she cried breathlessly.

"I would n't waste time trying, if I were you," he answered.

"How can I make you believe me?" she repeated.

"It is no great matter;" he spoke more to himself than to her. "A few months sooner or later, that is all."

"Then there is no hope!" With a pitiful, un-

controllable gesture her hands moved towards him, and then she caught them in each other as if she would have wrung them off. She faced him in silence a moment longer; then, "I have n't said I was sorry for you, Dan, and you ought to be grateful to me for that," she said, and the bitter, despairing misery in her eyes was one of the memories that haunted Dan through the first months of his darkness. Kate turned and left him. Her face was that of a woman who has stood before the scorn of the man she loves.

Walter saw Dan off at the steamer.

"I wonder," said Dan, with a rare acquisition of wistfulness, "I wonder, Wally, if I shall be able to see you when I get back."

Walter wrung his hand. "It is breaking my heart, old boy."

Dan smiled. "I would n't let it do that."

"Perhaps the Paris doctor can do something."

"Perhaps," answered Dan without conviction.

"I had rather take it myself."

"Don't be a fool, Wally. Can I give any messages for you in Paris?"

Then Walter knew the real reason for the journey. He went home cursing the wanton cruelty and huge stupidity of fate.

In Paris, Dan hunted up the office of a world-famed oculist.

"Have you come with hope?" the Frenchman asked him, after completing an examination.

"No," said Dan.

"That is well, since I can give you none." He paused, looking at the tall, powerfully built American.

"*C'est dur*," he said reflectively. "You are a comparatively young man yet."

"Thirty-two," Dan told him.

"*Tiens.* I had thought you older. *Oui, c'est dur. Mais que voulez-vous? C'est la vie.* There are many others. Most of them get used to it, sooner or later — sooner or later. You don't look as if you would get used to it easily."

"I don't expect to," answered Dan dryly, as he rose. "Can you tell me how much longer my eyes are likely to last?"

The little doctor shrugged his shoulders. "Impossible to say. It may be months, it may be weeks. Avoid late hours and many lights. I regret I can do nothing for you. My fee is *peu de chose*, thirty francs."

Dan paid him the money, and went on his way wondering of what use was the man of science, since knowledge of worlds could not cure a diseased

nerve, and of what use the so-called man of God, since he could only tell one stumbling in utter darkness to hope for possible light beyond, and to trust what no one has ever seen.

He wandered aimlessly down the Boulevard des Italiens, his broad shoulders and gaunt featured face towering above the small, nimble Frenchmen. On passing the Opera House he read the announcement that Mademoiselle Winifred Meredith would make her début there that night, in Verdi's Otello.

Chapter VIII

AT THE CROSSWAYS

THE gorgeous Paris Opera House, a fit expression of the most brilliant, the most frivolous, the cleverest, and the wickedest people in the world, was rapidly filling.

Slowly Daniel Howard moved down the centre aisle. Silent and sombre and massive in the midst of much laughter and dazzling scintillations from lights and jewels, he took his seat and stared at the great green curtain. His lips were dry, and his heart pounded like the screw of a steamer when the seas run high.

He had forgotten himself, for the woman he loved was going to stand before this great audience, a candidate for their admiration or contempt.

The overture began, and during the excited, portentous music of the first act he waited, tense and maddened, for the face he had last seen under the stars — the face that had been tremulous, and passionately questioning the power of love. At last there was a stir among the audience, a universal

adjustment of opera glasses, and amid an expectant silence Winifred came on the great stage.

She moved gracefully, quietly, with a delicate queenly poise, before hundreds of critical eyes. The next moment she was singing — singing easily, joyously — somewhat as he had heard her years ago in the poppy garden.

And this was the same Winifred, his Winifred, the love of his youth, the deep need of his soul. Her singing, fresh and spontaneous, rang through his consciousness till its sweetness became a pain, the pain a passion, and the whole a love wilder and deeper than he had yet known.

The man next to him tapped his arm, offering an opera glass. "*Elle n'est pas mal*," he said critically. Dan adjusted the glass to his eyes, wondering dully why he did not strangle the man where he sat. Through the powerful lens he saw her distinctly, and with an odd sense of familiarity and strangeness traced the dearly loved features. "*Elle a une belle voix*," said his neighbor, addressing him again; and a little later he added that she was a good actress. To these remarks Dan made no reply. They caused him unreasoning rage; but his head was clearing. He could look and listen with comparative calm, for above and beyond his own pain grew the thought, "What matters it how I suffer,

if she is happy?" In her singing and acting he saw qualities of unrealized greatness; but to-day she was a good artist, and nothing more. Her voice was pure and strong, her acting intelligent, but her audience were unmoved save by respect and critical admiration. There was no definite fault to find, and much to praise; but certainly it was not for such success as this that Winifred had worked.

During the entr'acte he scribbled a few words to her on his card.

"What time can I see you to-morrow?" he wrote briefly, and procured an usher who promised to deliver it into her own hands. The reply came before the third act: "To-morrow after four," she had written.

As the great tragedy gathered force for its close, Dan realized that Winifred was carrying her audience as much by the invincible assurance of her personality as by the excellence of her art. She failed to profit by the chance for pathos in the exquisite prayer of the last act; but in Desdemona's sudden cry there was a passion and terror that startled, and proved her capable of stirring where she could not touch.

When the curtain dropped Winifred received several recalls from an appreciative but unenthusi-

astic audience, and bowed her acknowledgment with a confident grace and reserve that gave no hint of disappointment.

Dan smiled. "It is so like the child to treat her audience as a queen treats her subjects," he thought. "After all, it is doubtless the best way. Audiences, like individuals, take you largely on your own estimation." But he knew that Winifred could not be content; he knew that years of disappointment and bitterness must be hers before the goal of success was reached, and he knew that she would struggle without faltering to the end.

On his way out some one tapped him on the shoulder, and he turned to face the doctor who had pronounced his final doom that morning.

"My dear sir," said the little man, "this will not do. If you continue to put strains of this kind on your eyes, they will fail you — piff — suddenly as one blows out a candle."

Dan thanked him indifferently and would have passed on, but the Frenchman faced him with earnest professional scrutiny. "Have you any friends in Paris?" he asked.

Dan told him no.

"Then go home at once. It would not be agreeable to go blind in a strange city. Perhaps you are with your wife."

Dan looked at him as one might look at an objectionable insect.

"I have not asked your advice," he said.

The doctor spread out his hands deprecatingly.

"*Mon cher monsieur*, I am sorry I offended," he protested. There was a certain compassion in his eyes which Dan took to mean that it was not worth while resenting the words of a man who would soon be blind. He went out into the streets with his hat pulled over his eyes. He thought of Winifred bowing before the footlights in the days of triumph that would surely be hers: he thought of himself an object of pity through black years to come; and then he thought of the dark river, slipping silently under granite bridges.

Suddenly he became aware of intense pain in his eyes, and remembered the doctor's words: "Your eyes will fail suddenly as one blows out a candle." Dan wanted one more day of sight as he never could want anything again; to stand before Winifred and see her face was the last and supreme wish of his life. But he made no appeal to infinite mercy. In these days of suffering he had never wavered in his belief that what God there was knew best; he had never been weak enough to beg that eternal laws might be put aside for him, and now he did not pray, as men name prayer, but fought through

the night with no help beyond the forces of his own soul and a belief in eternal wisdom.

The dawn was so long in coming that he feared never to see another day, and with thanksgiving unspeakable saw at last the light filter through the folds of his window curtain, and familiar objects detach themselves from surrounding darkness.

There were many hours still to be lived through before he could see Winifred, and he partially employed them by engaging a passage on the next steamer, and cabling to Walter.

At four o'clock he climbed the narrow stairway to her rooms. A maid opened the door and ushered him into a small antechamber where he heard laughter and excited voices from the room beyond. Dan had not expected this.

"Mademoiselle is occupied?" he asked. "I must see her alone."

"*Oui, Monsieur.* I will present Monsieur's card to Mademoiselle." The little maid disappeared hastily. She was frightened by the gaunt sombreness of Dan's face.

"*Mon Dieu, quel homme!* I believe he is dangerous, and these foreigners are so big," she said to herself.

There was another man in the anteroom. He addressed Dan in bad French.

"Monsieur does not remember me?"

Dan looked him over carelessly.

"I do not," he answered briefly, being in no humor for the elaborate veneer of French courtesy.

"Permit me to recall myself. My name is von Reidnitz. Monsieur insulted me once, and since then I have not ceased to cherish the hope of revenge. For the present the world is large enough for us both."

"Doubtless, but the room is not." Dan stood carelessly with his hands in his pockets; the indifference of his attitude and the easy insolence of his words enraged the Austrian. He drew a fierce breath.

"It happens that I was just going, otherwise — Monsieur has insulted me a second time. I offer Monsieur my card, and to-morrow my friends will call upon him."

Dan laughed shortly, and tearing the card in two he tossed it into the grate.

"Monsieur refuses my challenge!"

"You imagine yourself to be acting melodrama," said Dan in a casual tone.

And then Winifred parted the curtains and stood before him, not an operatic prima donna, but the Win of old, fresh and true and wholesome.

In the joy of seeing her a world of pain and longing slipped from his consciousness.

"I am so glad to see you, Dan," she said, holding out both hands with frank pleasure. "It is too bad all these people are here." She indicated her visitors with a girlish, backward nod. "But I felt I ought to see them; they will go soon, and you can wait, can't you? I am longing to know all you thought about last night."

Dan said he could wait, and, with an indifferent acknowledgment to introductions, seated himself in a shadow and watched her. She was dressed in some white stuff that floated when she moved, and there were crimson roses near her throat. The effect was French, and he did not like it, though it gave her a subtle womanly charm that had not been hers in the days gone by. His eyes rested with relief on her smooth dark hair, which she wore in the old, simple, girlish fashion, brushed back loosely, and twisted in a heavy knot behind.

Quite a circle of people were about her, and she talked to them with light-hearted gayety. Yet in some way she had changed. Public life had already set its stamp on her. She had lost girlish gestures, exaggerated enthusiasms, and gained dignity and grace. There was a delicate poise to her head, which differed from the aggressive confidence

of her girlhood. The somewhat abrupt lines of her personality had become rounded, and softened, and polished. The brown eyes were as direct and true as ever: fearless eyes, though one saw in their depths that they had looked on much; innocent eyes that were no longer ignorant.

The people round her, men particularly, were loud in praise of her last night's appearance. She took their compliments easily, with a certain charming insolence that was too delicate to offend, and conveyed a piquant sense of aloofness and indifference.

Mrs. Smith, the chaperon, dispensed tea and propriety from a small table. She seemed used to being ignored. Minutes wore on, and Dan watched and waited. The air of the room was close and sweet with the perfume of flowers. The doorbell rang constantly to admit new visitors, and there was continual passing to and fro. Was this what he had come for? A passion of pain and jealousy tore him.

Still he waited, and watched Winifred in the flush of her young triumph, receiving adulation, surrounded by flowers. What would she think of him, halting and groping — she who worshiped success and strength?

"My God!" he cried under his breath. It was

for this that he had waited all these years; for this — to sit down in the dark and hear her go by in the distance. It was chiefly to lay them at her feet that he had worked to conquer wealth and fame, and now it was all over; the work of his life had gone for nothing; he was to be turned to the wall like a worthless picture.

Gradually the guests were leaving, and before he knew what was coming he was alone with her. She put her hands to her head with a weary little gesture.

"I am so glad they have gone, and I am so glad you are here," she told him.

He sat down by her in the dusk and firelight, and keeping well in the shadow himself, fed his eyes hungrily and despairingly on every line of her face.

She leaned back in an attitude of physical listlessness, and looked at him with a smile. "I think I am tired, for the first time in my life," she said. "It is so nice and restful to have you here, Dan; but how do you happen to be in Paris at this season?"

He was noting that her hair had become loosened on one side, and thinking how lovely her eyes were with their shade of weariness. She had to repeat her words before he thought to answer.

"Why are you here? I suppose it is business."

"Yes, business."

"It is the most fortunate business I ever knew. Now tell me exactly what you thought of last night."

He was striving to see her more distinctly, and realizing how nearly the darkness was upon him; but aloud he said, "I think you will be a great artist some day."

She sat up with an increase of animation. "You were disappointed?"

"No."

"I was. I am not satisfied; I am not satisfied at all. Now I don't want you to try to comfort me. I want the truth."

"Would you take my version of it?"

"Not unless it agreed with my own." She laughed a little. "Speaking seriously," she continued,—"speaking seriously, I should; for I can't see myself or hear myself as you see and hear me."

It seemed to him that she had grown thinner, and he liked her better so; but he was never to see her again.

"One person says one thing, another says another," Winifred went on with troubled eyes. Madame Alberto says I have not been touched by the

'*feu sacré*.' Edith says the difficulty lies in the reserve and indifference of my nature. The newspapers say I am to be admired with tranquil pulses. But what is the remedy to all this? I — Dan, you are not listening to me!"

"Forgive me, Winifred." He passed his hand across his forehead; she was puzzled by the gesture, which was new to him.

"I believe you are tired," she spoke kindly.

"No. I am all right." Dan's lips were dry. He was saying good-by to her eyes, to her lips, to every line, and curve, and gesture. After this nothing could matter much.

"It is growing dark. Could n't we have a light?" he asked.

She looked surprised.

"Of course; but I thought you liked to sit in the dark."

"I believe I did once."

She rose to light a lamp. "I always do this myself," she explained; "Marie makes it smoke so."

He watched with wistful eagerness as the light grew on her face. Unconsciously he spoke her name.

"Winifred."

She turned to him with gravely wondering eyes.

"I have always been Win to you as to every one. Only papa called me Winifred the day he died. Why have you called me Winifred twice to-night, Dan?"

Without answering he rose and came to where she stood with the light streaming full upon her. Her face was touched by the shadow of grave thoughts, and her eyes, dark, shining, and somewhat questioning, were raised to his. Through the years to come he would remember her oftenest so.

"You are not like yourself," she said. "I do not believe you are well. You ought not to work so hard."

He was thinking how easy it would be to take her in his strong arms. Her voice came to him from a distance.

"Last week Jack Allison passed through Paris," she was saying. "He told me you were looking ill and seemed irritable. This should not be, Dan. I can imagine you angry to the killing point; but you are too large for irritability."

It was necessary for him to pause before speaking. "I will do better in the future," he said.

Some one knocked at the door. "Letters for Mademoiselle, and a box of flowers."

Unreasoning rage seized upon Dan. "Who sends you flowers?"

"A great many people; there is safety in their numbers."

As Winifred opened the box, the heavy odor of tuberoses filled the room. A card lay on the waxen mass, and at the sight of it her lips tightened. She replaced the cover on the box and handed it to Marie. "A man waits?"

"*Oui, Mademoiselle.*"

"I supposed so. Tell him there has been a mistake. I do not receive flowers from Count C——."

"Who is he?" asked Dan when they were left alone.

"A horrid little *roué* who has been rather persistent."

"And you subject yourself to these things." Dan drew in a deep, fierce breath. "There are other flowers here that you do receive." His voice was harsh.

"Of course. It is part of my life. Don't be foolish, Dan!"

She motioned him to a seat; but he remained standing before her, and she sighed somewhat impatiently. It was certainly selfish of Dan to spoil her little triumphs by his personal feeling. She did not know that he had come three thousand miles to see her face for the last time.

"And the life satisfies you?" he asked.

"Yes." She spoke a little defiantly.

"It is not the life for a high-bred woman."

"A lady can be a lady always, everywhere." She met his eyes steadily. "Don't you trust me?"

"Utterly and for always."

"Well, then?" — She spoke lightly.

"You court admiration, when you might have love; you cultivate brilliancy instead of tenderness. It is the century's lesson; you are learning it too well." He was speaking with his lips to silence the words in his heart.

"My dear Dan, have you come here to lecture me on woman's rights?" she asked wearily.

"No, I did not come here for that. Good-by, Winifred."

"Good-by? Why, you have only just come — you can't go. I want to know all you think of my singing."

"I think you have a great talent which you will use greatly when you have learned the lesson of love or pain."

She smiled faintly. It was easier not to meet Dan's eyes.

"I think you have said something of this sort before," she remarked, putting up her hands to unpin the roses from her throat. Their perfume made her faint.

"Who gave them to you?" he asked fiercely.

"What right have you" — But he crushed her hands, roses and all, in his. His face, hungry and savage, bent close to hers, and a great oath crashed through his set teeth.

"Dan!" she whispered, "Dan!" And her terrified eyes appealed to him as they had done once before, when they had been boy and girl together, and she had fallen into deep water. The shock of the memory made him reel.

"My God, my God! what have I done?" he cried, releasing her. "Winifred — forgive me;" with infinite tenderness he took her hands into both of his big trembling ones. "Winifred, forgive me. I am going now" — His deep voice broke.

"Winifred" — he looked at her with dumb, imploring eyes — "Winifred, little Win, I 'm going. Tell me first that up to this moment I never hurt you — that I have not brought shadows across your life."

"You have always brought what was good and happy," she spoke tremulously, forgiving him since his face showed so great a pain.

"Thank God!" he said, and bending he kissed her hand as one going into the valley of shadows kisses the holiest and loveliest thing he leaves be-

hind. For a moment longer his eyes lingered on her, and then he was gone.

A little later Edith came in quickly.

"What have you been doing to Dan Howard?" she asked excitedly of Winifred, who stood with a pale face where he had left her.

"I have done nothing," she answered.

"I met him just now on the stairs. He did not know me till I got quite close, and then his face frightened me."

"I have done nothing," she repeated.

"Nothing! Nothing! All these years you have taken the best of him, to send him away with empty hands at last — and it is nothing."

Winifred disregarded the reproaches. "Dan must be in some great trouble," she said, and drew in her breath quickly. "How could I let him go?" Her own partial success looked pale and worthless beside the memory of Dan's face, and the broken, despairing tenderness of his last words.

"I must write to him," she moved to her desk. Then her hands dropped helplessly. "I don't know his address!" she exclaimed. "He did not tell me where he was staying."

The girls stared at each other speechless, with a sense of disaster unjustified by circumstances. Then Edith flung out her hands.

"You put aside his love for the sake of what you called success," she cried, "and now you have let him go, and nothing so much worth while will ever come into your life again! Oh, Winifred, you have been a fool! a fool! a fool!"

Chapter IX

SHADOWS

THAT night, as Dan passed through the courtyard of his hotel, he again came face to face with the little French specialist.

"I followed you in here," said the latter. "I have been thinking over your case. Would you be willing to take a risk?"

"What do you mean?" demanded Dan, standing above him.

"Small chance and much danger," continued the doctor. "Do you care to try?"

"You speak of an operation?"

"Precisely. Whom did you see last?"

"Dr. Davage."

"And he advised nothing of the sort?"

"Nothing."

"Hum — *il s'y connait. Pourtant* — one might try, one might also hesitate."

"How great is the chance?"

"Very small, my friend, almost invisible."

"What is the danger?"

"Greatly increased loss of sight."

"Can the operation be performed to-morrow?"

"The sooner the better. But you should consider it well."

"It does not need consideration. Be so good as to fix the hour and place."

"*Mon Dieu!* and they say we French move quickly! If you come to my office to-morrow at nine o'clock we can arrange details. But first — I beg of Monsieur not to take offense — but first it would be well to notify some friend, some acquaintance even. If the worst should come — Monsieur speaks French well, but without the eyes — and alone in a strange city."

"At nine to-morrow, you say?" Dan spoke quietly.

"At nine to-morrow; and remember I promise little, and fear much. Think well before you come. *Au revoir, Monsieur.* Think well."

One day early in March, Walter received a cablegram from Dan. "Sailing in the C——, March 3d. Meet me or send Stirling," the message ran. A week later he was waiting on the wharf for the great ocean liner.

He was impatient and anxious, and spoke absent-mindedly to the few acquaintances he met.

Over and over he asked himself the meaning of the cable. Dan's doom must be already upon him, that he had asked to be met. The March wind was cold; low-flying hurrying clouds looked eager and angry. The harbor waters were dark and troubled by ungainly ferryboats and aggressive tugs, which plied their way here and there with much noise and disturbance. Everywhere was gloom and apparent chaos, which seemed natural enough since Dan was going blind. Stirling appeared suddenly from an inconspicuous corner.

"I don't think there 's any need of your staying," Walter told him.

"I want to stay," answered Stirling. "I won't be in the way," he added.

The man and the boy, who were almost strangers, looked into each other's eyes, and finding a common grief, grasped hands silently.

"I suppose it 's all up with him," said Walter, as they fell in pace side by side.

"He may have only wanted to make sure of us in case anything happened on the voyage," suggested Stirling.

"Why, that 's so! I never thought of that." Then Walter added with quick hopefulness, "Perhaps he is better; perhaps the Paris doctor could cure him."

"No, he would not have cabled in that case," objected Stirling. Then he fixed his quiet, observant eyes on Walter. "Why did Mr. Howard go to Paris?" he asked.

The older man betrayed himself by a minute's hesitation.

"He said it was to consult an oculist," he answered.

"Did you believe him?"

"Why not?"

"I did n't."

Walter turned up the collar of his coat and settled his chin into it. "It is little good he will get out of whatever he goes for," he said, with gloomy impatience.

"You don't mean that she does n't care for him?"

"She? — who?"

"The woman he went abroad to see."

Walter glanced suspiciously over the edge of his collar. "Look here," he said. "I did n't tell you that, did I?"

Stirling smiled a little. "No, you did n't exactly tell me."

Walter felt something akin to awe of this slight, pale-faced boy. "I suppose it's your legal training," he remarked inconsequently. "Is this process to

which you have subjected me commonly known as cross-examination?"

"Not exactly." Stirling smiled again. He was thinking that law cases would be vastly simplified if all witnesses were as ingenuous as this big, gentle-eyed man.

"How did you happen to settle upon a woman as the reason of Dan's trip?" asked Walter.

"By the process of elimination. I could see the doctor was only an excuse, and owing to his dependence on my eyes I knew he could have few or no business secrets from me. So I argued that it must be a personal matter; but only about a woman would a man be so secretive. The day he sailed he said I was to open all his letters save any that might come from Paris. One came a few days later, and it was in a woman's handwriting. I supposed he had crossed the ocean to ask her to marry him."

Walter shook his head. "Dan will never do that now."

"Why not?" There was no longer occasion for shrewd suspicion of superficial motives, and Stirling was talking like a boy again.

"He would n't think it right if he were blind."

"But if they loved each other?"

"He would n't think it honorable even then."

"*She* might."

"Yes — she *might*."

"You mean she does n't care for him?"

"I don't mean anything. He never mentions her name to me. I know no more than the rest of his acquaintances."

Stirling longed to know more, and did not doubt his ability to entrap Walter into a partial confession, but a nice sense of honor kept him silent.

They paced the dismal, draughty place for some time without speaking. There was a growing bustle from cabmen and custom-house officials; but no steamer came in sight.

At last they paused on the edge of the wharf and looked seaward.

"There she is!" cried Stirling suddenly.

"You 're right," said Walter, and in silence they watched the ocean monster enter the harbor.

"I wish it were over," said Stirling, at last.

"If it were any one in the world but Dan." Walter's voice was husky.

"I know," answered Stirling. For a moment Walter dropped his eyes from the incoming steamer to the boy's face.

"You have n't known him long."

Stirling kept his face turned seaward. "He has been very generous about helping me — with

money to move my mother, and — but it is n't only that."

"I know," said Walter in his turn.

They were silent again till the steamer came near enough for the faces to be distinguished.

"Do you see him?" asked Walter.

"Not yet."

A little crowd pressed to the edge of the wharf. Some one jostled Garrison's shoulder.

"Waiting for Daniel Howard?" asked a man's voice.

"Yes."

"So am I." Walter recognized a prominent politician.

"What do you want of him?" he asked. "He — he is not well."

"Sorry to hear that. We want him to speak next Thursday at a meeting of the sound-money Democrats."

"He won't do it," said Walter.

"Well, I guess I 'll give him the chance," drawled the man.

"I see him," cried Stirling quickly. "There, standing by one of those — what do you call 'em? — they look like magnified trumpets and are painted red inside. He is talking to a steward, he is feeing him — he is all right!"

"I see him, dear old Dan. Yes, he is all right."

Walter wrung Stirling's hand.

"Perhaps he is cured."

"Why did he cable, then?"

In a little while the gang-plank was flung to the steamer's deck, and an eager stream of passengers passed over it. Dan, walking leisurely, came down among the last.

"Well, Dan," was Walter's only greeting as he grasped his hand.

"So you came," answered Dan. "I did n't need you, but I thought I might. Hullo, Stirling, you here too? I could n't have needed you both in any case."

"I wanted to come," explained the boy.

"That 's all right. Who is this?"

The politician stepped up. "Don't you remember me, Mr. Howard? I am Jim Allison of" — He passed his arm through Dan's and drew him to one side.

"Will he do it?" asked Stirling.

"Yes."

"How can he — now?"

"That 's Dan," answered Walter.

The conference was a short one, and Dan dismissed the man with a careless nod.

"Are you going to speak for him?" asked Walter.

"Yes; I have wanted a fling on the sound money question for some time."

"Is this the time to have it?"

"It is as good as any other."

"Are you better?"

"No, it is pretty bad; and there is always the satisfaction of knowing it will be worse before it is better," answered Dan with an attempt to smile. "The operation left me so much worse, that I did n't expect to be able to find my way down the gangway alone by the time I reached home."

"The operation!" exclaimed Walter. "You said nothing to me of that."

"There was little to say. I was offered the probability of immediate increase in loss of sight, for the improbability of arresting the disease. Naturally, I took the chance — and lost it."

Walter offered no sympathy. "You ought to have cabled me," he said. "One of us could have gone over."

"Sometimes I think you are more of a fool than most of us, Wally," was the answer. "But I won't deny that I wanted you — rather. It was dismal coming out of it."

In Dan's worn, deeply lined face there was more of gravity and less of harshness than when he went away, and his lips were showing something of the

austere strength which was to be theirs in the years to come.

After Stirling had been sent to the office for some business papers, the two friends drove home almost in silence. Once within the old room Dan put a strong hand on his friend's shoulder and wheeled him to the window.

"I want to have a look at you," he said; and looking, the lines in his face softened somewhat.

"It is good to see you again," he commented at last. "I can see you right enough in this light. I thought I could n't, at the wharf." The two men faced each other a little longer in silence; then Dan smiled.

"Do you remember where we used to hide our fishing tackle on old Scotch Henty's farm?" he asked, with a half quizzical, half wistful look which sat oddly on his gaunt face.

Walter nodded in silence.

"I wonder how many of his Scotch oaths we could remember now," went on Dan. "We used to share our luncheon in those days; we have shared nearly everything since; but the time has come when we share things no longer. Lucky for you we don't, is n't it, Wally?"

Walter shook off the detaining hand and paced the room, swearing softly under his breath. For a

little while Dan watched him in silence; then he clapped him on the back with rough affection.

"Dinna greet for me, lad," he said. "Dinna greet. I sha'n't be found wanting when the hour arrives."

He shook his huge frame as a dog shakes off water after a bath.

"Just now I feel like a smoke," he went on. "Give me a light and tell me the news."

Walter hesitated. "I had a letter this morning that might interest you," he said, and handed him an envelope with a foreign stamp. "Can you make it out?"

"I'll try; is it legible?"

Dan walked to the window, and as his back was turned Walter could not see if his face changed when he recognized Winifred's firm handwriting. The note was short: —

My dear Mr. Garrison (it ran). Will you kindly send me Mr. Howard's address? or else some news of him? I saw him a short time ago, looking so ill and seeming so unlike himself that I am troubled, particularly as I have had no word from him since then, and he left me neither address nor clue to future movements.

Sincerely yours, Winifred Meredith.

Dan took a long time to read these few words, whether from failing sight or emotion Walter could only guess. When he turned round his face was impassive.

"What do you want me to do?" asked Walter. "Shall you answer it yourself?"

"No," said Dan. "I should like you to write her that I am at home and well."

"Only that?"

"Only that."

"Then you have not told her" —

"No."

Walter took another turn down the room and tugged at his mustache.

"Of course you know she will have the right to feel hurt."

"Yes, I know."

"Let me tell her on my own account."

Dan knocked the ashes from his cigar before answering.

"There is no use in troubling her about it," he said slowly. "I don't care to discuss it. There is only one thing to do. I am doing it, as you would in my place."

By a reluctant silence Walter acknowledged Dan to be in the right. It is an obvious point in masculine ethics that a man who cannot see to

walk by himself must not ask a woman to walk with him.

During the afternoon Stirling returned according to directions.

"You 're not going to do business now!" exclaimed Walter.

"Why not?"

"Better come to the club."

"No. It bothers me not to recognize people. Has any one got wind of it?"

"Not that I know of."

"You had better go to the club yourself. Now, then, Stirling."

Instead of going to the club Walter took a long, never-to-be-forgotten walk. He would have given his life over and over to save Dan, but apparently God did not want his life. Nothing but Dan's eyesight would do. As men go, Walter was a good churchman; his creed was simple, comprehensive, and up to this moment had been equal to all demands put upon it, but to-day the foundations of his belief rocked. Walter was not one to read universal meanings, or to see beyond the hour. It could not be for the best that Dan should go blind, and so, in this hour of doubt and pain, Walter unconsciously took Dan's side against the Infinite Powers.

He went home to find Dan standing with his back to the empty fireplace, this being a masculine, if somewhat incomprehensible, attitude to which he was especially prone. Stirling was putting papers together.

"Come in, Wally," said Dan. "We sha'n't worry you with any more work to-day. It is growing dark and I can't afford to lose Stirling's eyes as well as my own."

He spoke in a casual tone of easy self-possession which was in strong contrast to Walter's despairing gloom, and Stirling's dumb, watchful anxiety.

"How did your mother stand the move?" he asked Stirling.

"Very well," began the boy eagerly. "I — we can never thank you enough for" —

"Nonsense," broke in Dan, who had not outgrown a ludicrous objection to being thanked. "Did she resent your being used as another man's eyes?"

"She was as proud of my connection with you as I am myself."

"Ah, proud, you say? I should n't have thought of it in that light; there is little to be proud of in connection with me. I suppose your mother and sister think you a very remarkable young man."

"They do exaggerate things a good deal," said Stirling modestly.

"Yes, mothers and sisters have that way, I believe. They endow you with all their own virtues and add a few, such as courage and strength, wrongly supposed to be purely masculine. You have one great objection, Stirling: you are too good to be sworn at."

"I hope I shall never give you occasion for that," answered the boy seriously.

Dan reflected a few moments. "Stirling," he said at length, "did you ever suspect yourself to be lacking in a sense of humor?"

"No, sir," he answered, evidently puzzled. "I never thought about it."

"So I imagined. It is a pity, for it would help things along amazingly. Well, never mind. You may go now; I shall not need you again this evening."

The next day Dan went over some of the personal effects for which he could no longer find use. There were his books, collected during the brief years of his youth, when he had found time for gratifying his love of the best in literature, and satisfying his thirst for knowledge of the great thoughts of great minds. The dust lay on his book-shelves now, but he passed his hands over

them with affection. There was a goodly company of Greeks and Latins and the English classics, a list of immortal names dear to the scholar's heart, and a fair representation of German philosophers. Voltaire and Rousseau were side by side, and Dan smiled. Certainly his taste for reading had been catholic. On the lower shelves were the modern poets of modern tongues, and many a well-thumbed volume of political economy, social reform, and the revolutionary philosophy of the nineteenth century.

Dan reflected that he had certainly made the best of life while it had been under his own ordering, nor had the light of his eyes been wasted. Had action tempted him less, scholarship had tempted him more; as it was, he had secretly nourished visions of years to come when he could own a library of worth, and enjoy it with Winifred. He smiled now at the futility of his dream. There had been two summers when Winifred had learned and read Greek with him. He was proud to remember her appreciation of the rugged, remote sublimity of Æschylus, and her enjoyment of the more human and versatile Sophocles. He could never read a line of his books again, and was puzzled to know how to dispose of them. There was Winifred; but she no longer cared for books.

The vision of a life before the world had dazzled her eyes. He knew that her ambition was more the result of abundant vitality than of desire for gratified vanity, but in the mean time it sucked the life of her mind like a vampire. When she had conquered the longed-for lands she would find how little they were worth, and then, but not till then, would she recognize her own. He decided to keep his little library in expectation of a day when they might find room in her house and mind. There was no one else to want them! Few men were as detached from ties of relationship as himself, and he was glad now that there was neither father, mother, nor sister to grieve when he entered into the life that was no life, the death that was no death.

In a carefully locked drawer were Winifred's letters, everything she had ever written him since the day he first knew and told her of his love. The package was not large, for she had never been a good correspondent. He undid the twine that held it, and slowly, one by one, he handled the letters. The handwriting was blurred to his failing sight, but one of the envelopes, addressed in larger letters than the others, he opened and read: "You are always so cross when I thank you for anything; but please let me say how delighted

I was with" — Then the letters grew dim and confused under his eyes. The words were from the past of his dead hope and living love. With the letter crushed in his hand he stretched his arms across the table and dropped his head on them. So he stayed during the long sunny afternoon; but when the dusk came he rose, and gathering up her letters, burned them one by one in the empty grate.

It was several days after this that he came home late to find Walter waiting for him with ill-concealed anxiety.

"What did you suppose had happened to me?" Dan dropped into a chair and stretched his long legs. "Don't make me feel like a child under orders any sooner than is necessary," he said.

Walter paced the room. "There are the churches," he suggested, doubtfully and relevantly of nothing.

"Not for me," was the answer. "There are questions to which a man may find the answer only in his own soul."

"I wish I could say something," Walter said huskily.

"I am so glad you can't."

"How is it going?"

"Time allowance is getting short."

"Do you still have pain? I heard you walking your room last night."

"I should n't mind the pain if every attack did not take something from my sight."

Walter made an inarticulate exclamation, then he said aloud, "If you only would n't be so infernally uncomplaining about it."

"Bah! I am not a dog to whine," answered Dan. Then he added more gravely, "I can't be peevish, it 's rather too solemn — this slow passing from light into darkness. It is the renunciation of life without the release of death," he added a little later, which was the only revelation of personal feeling he was ever heard to make.

Chapter X

DAN'S LIGHTS GO OUT

A FEW days later Dan came into Walter's office late in the afternoon.

"Have you anything on for this evening?" he asked, "because if you have n't I should like you to go with me to the political meeting at which I have been asked to speak."

"That 's all right," answered Walter. "Wait a moment; I 'll go along with you now, if you 're going home."

"I want you to come because I hate being alone in a crowd," explained Dan a little later, as they pushed their way through the streets. "My nerve is going," he added with grim disgust.

Walter looked into the haggard face. "Your nerve would be all right if you would go to bed at reasonable hours," he suggested.

Dan shook his head. "It is n't that. I am a coward," he said. "I am afraid every minute of the day and night of being suddenly left in the dark. I can't cross these down-town streets with

out getting damp with fear, because I don't make out which way the cars are going till they get on to me."

As he spoke they stood on the edge of a great thoroughfare swarming with electric cars and teams. Walter slipped his arm through Dan's.

"Come along with me," he said. The help was accepted in silence, and Dan learned his first agonizing lesson of dependence.

"What a pity there is such a prejudice against sending bullets through the hearts of superfluous human wretches!" he remarked.

That night Dan spoke, and Walter watched him anxiously from a front bench. "The light is badly arranged; it must trouble him," he thought, looking with disgust at a powerful electric jet that was suspended from the ceiling almost on a line with the speaker's eyes.

Dan was not at his best. He showed his usual grasp of the situation in its entirety as well as in technical detail, and there were occasional flashes of subtle wit, stinging rather than humorous; but in every tone and gesture there was a sense of effort, and the usual compelling magnetism of his personality was lacking. The audience listened attentively, partly convinced by his unanswerable logic, but unenthusiastic. Suddenly Dan's voice

faltered and a gray shadow fell on his face. With bent head his body swayed forward till his hand rested heavily on the table beside him.

There was a moment of breathless silence, and then an uncomfortable movement throughout the hall. A friend on the platform stepped forward quickly and said a few words in his ear. Walter hurried to the stage, but as he entered the door Dan raised his head with the movement of a hunted animal at bay, and began to speak again. His words came slowly, doubtfully at first, but with increasing confidence and power, till Walter's fear was lost in wonder. He felt the pulse of the great assembly quicken and vibrate in response to an eloquence that was new to Dan. Never had he spoken with the nobility of thought, with the breadth and passion that were his in this hour. Campaigning issues were forgotten; a politician was not speaking to a party, but a statesman to a people, and the crowd were moved by his words as a grain-field is swayed by the wind.

In the breathlessness of that awful moment when he stood bowed and dumb before the great audience, blindness had come to Dan. Every force of the man's being rose to meet the occasion, and so far overleaped it that he could command mind, nerve, and people. His convictions, sluggish be-

fore, were forged in the white-hot passion of his suffering; his mind and will, strengthened by months of conquering struggle, rose triumphant over this moment of supreme pain.

There is no power greater or more mysterious than that of eloquence; there is no race more easily fired by it than the shrewd, proverbially calculating American. On this night the man must believe where the reason was unconvinced. The dishonest were honest. Those who had lived sordidly found themselves thinking loftily. Those who had known nothing beyond party issues were aglow with patriotism. In this electric hour men were not what they had been, but what the speaker chose them to be, and none present ever forgot the ringing words, or the pale impassioned face of the young orator as he stood in the glare of the lights, pleading for the integrity of our national life.

As the last sentence died away Dan put out his hands, and staggered with a groan that was lost in the wild applause that greeted the close of his speech. Several people sprang to his side, but Walter reached him first and led him away. There was much shouting, and whistling, and insistent calls for his reappearance. Some excited young spirits struck up "The Star Spangled Banner," which

was taken up by many voices in many keys. The walls shook with noise and the shuffling of feet. In the midst of the confusion an opposition leader struggled to the platform and tried to make himself heard, but his words were drowned and his passionate gestures were futile and ridiculous in the babel. The people roared at him good-naturedly. A few cool heads came together to discuss the speech, and the speaker. It had been a big speech, they said, and Howard was going to be a big man, a dangerous man possibly, a power to be reckoned with by the coming administration.

"He is an honest man," said one.

"Yes, and he will make other men honest, curse him!" was the answer, and then individual words were drowned in another wave of enthusiasm, and there were ringing cheers and calls for Daniel Howard, who never came.

In the coat-room he reeled like a drunken man, and clung to Walter. "Don't leave me," he said hoarsely. "It has come."

"Yes, I know. Steady, boy. I am not going far — just to get our coats."

"Take me with you," he pleaded.

So Walter took him, and while hundreds of voices shouted his name in the hall they had left, Dan stood a broken, helpless man, clinging to his

friend's arm with groping fingers. "It came suddenly before I got through speaking," he said.

"I know," answered Walter again.

They went out into the lighted streets, and the agony of the hours that followed was burned forever into the consciousness of both. Dan refused to be taken home, and they walked all night through a driving rain and bitter wind. He was maddened with physical pain that did not subside with loss of sight, and after the long strain of sleepless nights and mental anguish his nerves had given way. He lurched heavily in walking and blamed Walter for letting him stumble, and there were terrible times when he fought for the light with his hands, as a drowning man fights for air. At those moments Walter held him with all his strength and with a prayer on his lips. The night seemed an æon of chaotic and hideous darkness. It was not till the east grew pale that Dan allowed himself to be forced upon a bench, and, leaning his head against a tree behind him, fell into the unconsciousness of utter exhaustion.

They had come out of the city, and Walter, wide-eyed and alert, waited beside his friend, watching the black outline of distant houses detach itself from a brightening sky, while the rain

ceased, the clouds drifted seaward, and the stars, immeasurably serene and distant, faded from his view.

In a gray dawn the earth lay spent and still and ghostly, exhausted from the storm of the night, and in the growing light Walter could see Dan's face, weary and spent also, but quiet at last. The coming day sent a breath out from the east, the naked trees stirred, and there was an undefined whisper of awakening life through the fields and woods. Suddenly the sun shot up, glorious and mighty; a thousand voices answered his joyous challenge, and the brown earth was on fire with sparkling raindrops.

Dan moved and opened his eyes. The sun shone straight into them, but could bring no life or light there. For a few moments he was silent. His face looked too weary for further emotion; then he raised his head and put out his hand.

"You are there, Walter?" he asked.

Walter slipped his arm round Dan's shoulders. "Yes, old man. Shall we go home now?" Then he feared the unwonted gentleness of his tone might be resented, but Dan appeared to notice neither words nor gesture. He did not speak again at once.

"Are we in the country?" he asked finally in a

strangely dead voice. "I seem to hear things singing."

"Yes, nearly as far as Newton."

"Is it daylight?"

"The sun rose about five minutes ago."

"The sun rose five minutes ago." Dan repeated the words slowly and paused as if adjusting himself to the fact, but there was no change in the utterly weary lines of his face. He rose heavily. "Let us go home," he said, but after walking a few steps he stopped. "We must find a cab or something," he announced. "I am done up. I have been down to hell, and don't feel sure I am back alive."

They were near a small suburb where a carriage was easily obtainable in spite of the hour. Almost in silence they drove home. Dan shivered once and felt wonderingly of his coat, then of Walter's.

"We are wet," he said. "It must have rained."

"It did, nearly all night."

"I never noticed it. It can't have been good for your neuralgia."

"That's all right," said Walter, somewhat inarticulately. He put his hand on Dan's knee and neither of them spoke again. When the carriage drew up before their lodgings, the city was well awake, and by the time Dan had been laboriously

and distressfully gotten into dry clothes, and prevailed upon to take a cup of tea, it was time to go down town.

"Are you here still, Walter?" asked Dan; he sat in an armchair with his head sunk on his chest.

Walter put his hand on Dan's shoulder.

"Dan — old fellow" — he said brokenly.

"Yes, — I understand; don't try to say it, Wally."

Walter's breath labored with a great sob.

"We can't have any of that," said Dan. "You had better go; I heard the clock strike; I am best alone."

"I'll behave myself if you let me stay."

"No. I must fight it out alone. There is a strangeness and horror just at first; but there's the satisfaction of knowing — that there's plenty of time in which to get used to it." He spoke with effort through stiffened lips.

"Can't I do something for you down town?"

"Go to the office, and tell Stirling and the others. Stirling can come round to-morrow."

"Anything else?"

Dan collected his thoughts with evident difficulty. "I had an appointment at the club with Howland, and one or two others. Tell 'em — I can't go because I am blind. But tell 'em I am all

right; they are not to come round to sympathize — and all that."

Reluctantly Walter left him and heard the key turn on the inside of the study door as he closed it. The sound startled him. He paused and rattled the handle.

"Unless you swear not to do anything rash, I 'll break down the door," he called.

"Don't be an ass," came Dan's voice with something of its old spirit. "What do you take me for?"

Walter was satisfied. From Dan bowed in his armchair, from the despair of Dan's ruined life, and the tragedy of Dan's sightless eyes, Walter went into the busy streets. In his slow deep way he almost hated the light and life, because Dan could no longer share them.

The morning papers were full of the great speech; they spoke in flowery language of "the young orator whose star had just risen above the nation's horizon." Walter read with a set face. He felt like dashing his head against the wall in impotent rage and pain. When he entered Dan's office, Stirling rose to meet him with a pale, questioning face.

"Has it" — he began.

Walter nodded.

"Last night — at the speech?" questioned Stirling.

Walter nodded again.

"I thought so. I was there." There was a short silence. Stirling mechanically put some papers together, and the two men in Dan's employment looked up inquiringly.

"Does he want me?"

"To-morrow. Tell the other fellows; I can't."

One of the men rose and came forward. "Mr. Howard spoke to us himself yesterday," he said.

"It 's all up with him to-day," said Walter.

"That 's a pretty close call; we ought to have been told sooner," said the man. "I am more sorry for Mr. Howard than I ever was for any one in my life; but business is business. I can't afford to trust my fortunes with a man handicapped by blindness."

"Better get out of the office then," said Walter, goaded into unusual roughness.

"And lose my half-year's pay?"

"You 'll get it all right," said Stirling, flushing angrily.

"What security have I of that?"

"Mr. Howard's word."

"Ah, I did n't know you were in his confidence. Then I guess I 'll go. Coming with me, Cooledge?"

"No," said the other.

"Nonsense, man; business is business."

"I stay as matter of business. I had rather trust my fortune with Mr. Howard blind than with most lawyers who can see."

"And I had rather lose a fortune with Mr. Howard than make it with any other," said the boy defiantly.

Walter listened dully to this discussion. "I had better be going," he interrupted. "Be sure you come round early to-morrow."

Stirling followed him to the door. "I wish I might go to-day," he said wistfully.

"Better not; you know how he is when he says a thing."

Stirling still lingered. "Tell him" — he began, then added quickly, "No, there is nothing one can tell him."

"That 's just it," said Walter. He moved and spoke like one in a stupor; the whole world might die or suffer, but Dan —

Before night he was besieged by questions from friends and reporters. There was nothing to tell except the bald fact that Daniel Howard had gone stone blind; but as facts go, this was a startling one. At the clubs little else was talked of.

"Howard, of all men!" was the most usual ex-

clamation. "Poor fellow, does he take it hard?" asked one of his friends.

"How would you expect him to take it?" asked Walter angrily.

"Jove! I know how I'd take it!" exclaimed a prominent stock broker. "I'd knock my brains out against the first stone I stumbled over."

"I should n't wait to stumble," said the first speaker. "Imagine Daniel Howard stumbling!"

There were many things for Walter to do that day, and all the time he saw Dan sitting alone in the dark. There were moments when he heard again the click of the turning lock. Why had Dan locked himself in? He shivered as he ran up the stairs of his lodgings two hours earlier than usual. The door opened easily to his hand, and all he found was a lonely man who had grown old in a single day, and on whom some mysterious seal had already descended which set him forever apart from other men.

Chapter XI

TEMPTATION

MRS. RANDOLPH and her daughter sat over their French coffee and rolls. It was a warm day for March, even in Paris, and the windows were carefully shaded by Venetian blinds; but the blinds had been long unused; they fastened imperfectly, so that a ray of sunlight strayed through them and rested on Kate's face, and Kate's mother was looking at her with sudden awakening.

"She is growing old," Mrs. Randolph told herself. "You are not eating anything," she said aloud.

"I can't, mamma; food chokes me. Are you quite sure there was no American mail last night? Did Louise ask the *concierge?*"

"I told her to do so. Try to eat something, Kate. It is not becoming to you to be thin."

"I know it — I shall be a very plain old maid. I wish papa would write. It is not kind to leave us so long without home news."

"What are you expecting to hear? You are not usually so anxious for news from Boston."

Kate was silent.

"Your father does n't often trouble us with letters," continued her mother tranquilly.

"No, he is too good for us."

"My dear!" Mrs. Randolph put down her cup and looked at Kate with displeasure. "My dear! I think you are forgetting yourself."

"On the contrary, mamma, I am remembering." Kate pushed back her chair and flung herself on the sofa. There was abandoned misery in her attitude, and in her face something that neither years nor illness could explain. Mrs. Randolph understood little, but felt that the time had come to speak.

"Kate, my dear," she began.

Kate did not answer.

"Do you hear me, Kate?"

"Yes, mamma."

"I want to speak to you."

"Yes, mamma. I am listening."

Now that it came to the point of speaking, Mrs. Randolph found that she had nothing to say. "I think it is time you should end this sort of thing," she said vaguely.

"What sort of thing?"

"Why, not eating, and making strange remarks about other people being better than we are, and calling yourself an old maid. You know well enough what I mean."

Kate turned wearily on her side. "What do you want me to do?" she asked.

Her mother's wishes became suddenly and startlingly definite.

"I want you to marry Lord de Normandy," she said.

"I have told you often that I cannot marry."

Her mother began to cry weakly. "I don't know what I have brought you up for," she protested, "or how I could have done differently. Why should you reproach me for your being unhappy? I always sent you to the best schools, and took you where you could meet the best people, and never spared money on the best dressmakers."

"I don't reproach you, mamma," answered Kate wearily. "We haven't either of us made much of our lives; but I am more to blame than you, for you lack in some essential — I don't know what it is — and I lack in nothing. I have what other women have, and it tortures me. Don't answer! Don't argue! You can't understand. What is that? Some one knocked!" Kate sat up with sudden eagerness, and then with a little cry de-

scended on some letters that were pushed under the door. "Here is one from papa," she said with an odd breathlessness. "May I open it?"

"Certainly not. My letters are my own. Give it to me."

On the point of her self-importance Mrs. Randolph was unvaryingly firm. Kate yielded, and stood by the window with locked fingers while Mrs. Randolph adjusted her eyeglasses.

"He tells me he has sent our furs by Céleste," she began. "They ought to be here by the twenty-third. That will give us time to have them made up before we leave Paris. I wonder if he remembered my sable muff — let me see — no, he says nothing more about my affairs — how like him! Here is something about Dan. He made a big speech. What do I care about his speech? Why, what is this? I wish your father would write more distinctly! Don't stand so near, Kate. You are between me and the light. 'Poor Dan has lost his — his' — it looks like 'eyesight,' but he can't mean that."

"I will read it."

Kate took the letter quickly to the window.

"'Dan Howard made a splendid speech the other night,'" she read in a hard voice. "'He had an electrifying effect on the audience, which makes his

great misfortune to be regretted on public as well as on personal grounds.'"

"Well, my dear, what is it? what has he lost? I hope it is not his fortune, for I have always hoped that you might be induced to fancy him."

Kate gave a short laugh, or was it a sob? Mrs. Randolph did not know.

"'Poor Dan has lost his eyesight,'" read Kate with her back to the room. "'I have expected it for some time'"—

"How like your father, not to have told me!"

"'I have expected it for some time, but hardly looked for it so soon. He went blind in the middle of his speech, which makes the whole affair most extraordinary.'"

Kate laughed again. "How dramatic!" she said. "It reads like something in a play."

"Don't be flippant, my dear. Blindness is a very serious thing."

The letter was shaking in Kate's fingers. She read on: "'He is a man of splendid courage, and will meet this as he would meet anything else that came to him — with his face to the front.'"

"Is there nothing else?"

"I don't know. I can't see. I think I must be going blind too."

The letter dropped.

"I am glad you find something to joke about," said Mrs. Randolph gravely. "Poor Dan! I am sorry he has gone blind and thus put an end to anything between you two. I had always hoped — but blindness is even more impossible than loss of fortune. Where are you going? Here is another letter. It seems to be in Edith Meredith's handwriting, and is addressed to you. I did n't know they were in Paris. I suppose that disagreeable Winifred is here too."

Kate carried her letter to her own room.

"I wonder if she knows," she asked herself, tearing open the note with trembling fingers.

"I saw your name in the bank register, this morning," Edith had written, "and suppose you must have just come out. Do drop in and have tea with us to-morrow. Win has a good opportunity to tour in Russia, and we leave this week, Heaven knows for how many months or years. Did you see Dan before you left Boston? He was here four weeks ago looking dreadfully ill; since then we have heard nothing, and are afraid something is wrong."

Kate flung the note aside. Her slight frame quivered convulsively.

"He came out here to see her for the last time, and he never told her — he never told," she cried.

"That was like him. He loved her too well. I can tell her now. I can hurt her. Oh, how I long to hurt her!"

She began to dress herself with blind haste.

"What will she do? What will she say? I can see her looking at me with those eyes of hers. When I think of him, I feel as if I should go mad. She never cared for any one. But why should she? She had him. Perhaps now, when she hears, she may give up everything and go to him." Kate paused. "If I keep silent now, she may not know it for months; no one writes to her from Boston. I can't do it — I can't. It is my turn now. I have loved him longest, I have loved him best. I would have given up everything at any moment for him. I did n't need to know he was blind to know that I loved him. No, I can't do it. He could n't expect it of me after all these years. It is my only chance of being happy." Kate was crying with her head on the dressing-table. "I should have loved him so well. What must he not be living through now! Win could make him almost happy if she would. If I could only think of him as happy — but not with another woman — not that; I could n't bear that. Could he ever care for me? I shall never forget the scorn in his eyes that day. If I should tell Win now — and she should go to him

— and he should be made happy through me — perhaps he might hate me less."

Kate pinned on the thickest veil she owned and hurried down stairs to order a close carriage. "If I tell her, I shall deserve less contempt from him, though he will never know — he will never know," she repeated. "If I tell her, I shall throw away my one chance of being happy or good. What is he doing? What is he feeling? How he must want her! I know what it is to want a person night and day — to want, and want, and want till you almost go mad. I suppose he feels so, and he is blind — blind! I cannot bear it. I cannot think of him so. He must be happy, and if Win can make him so he must have her. Oh, why was I never taught to pray! I will tell her. Perhaps then I can forget the scorn in his eyes. Why was I never taught to pray?"

The carriage stopped.

Yes, Mademoiselle was *chez elle*, but Mademoiselle Edith had gone out.

For five maddening minutes Kate waited in a dark corner of Winifred's studio, and then Winifred came in to receive her with polite indifference. Winifred's cool, steady fingers touched Kate's feverish ones, and Winifred's poise and self-possession contrasted oddly with Kate's nervous tension.

"I hate her! I hate her! I hate her!" said Kate over and over to herself.

"I heard you were going to Russia, so I came to say good-by," she remarked aloud.

"Yes, we go in a day or so. I don't know when we shall come back. Home is as distant as dreams."

Winifred's tone was devoid of either elation or doubt. She sat with the full light on her clear, colorless skin, unwavering eyes, and firm lips.

Because she was a woman, Kate longed to break the news to her; because she loved Dan, she feared to do so; and because she hated Winifred, she could not part with the superiority her knowledge gave her.

"Have you a satisfactory engagement?" she asked, to save time.

"Financially it is."

Then a silence fell between them. Kate's lips moved to say, "Did you know that Dan was blind?" What she actually said was, "I saw him — Dan, I mean — in Boston just before I sailed." Then she waited.

None but the eyes of a jealous woman could have detected the change in Winifred's face; but it was there, and Kate saw it.

"Edith wrote me you were anxious about him,"

she continued, "and I came round to tell you that I had seen him."

"Ah." Winifred raised her eyebrows. Her serene, self-absorbed consciousness was unaccountably antagonized by Kate's manner. "It was very good of you," she said coldly. "But we had news of him the other day. I am sorry you took the trouble to come. It is most unlikely that you could know anything we had not already heard."

There was another silence, during which Winifred despised herself for the smallness of her last remark, while Kate suffocated with anger and pain. She rose suddenly. "I must go. Say good-by to Edith for me."

"She will be sorry to have missed you."

Both women faced each other. Certain words were crying aloud in Kate's consciousness, but her lips were silent.

Winifred was sorry for her pettishness. "It was good of you to come," she said cordially. "If we had n't had news last week, we should have been eager to hear all you knew. When you go home — which will be long before we do — be sure and tell Dan not to overwork himself. I am afraid he has done so lately. Good-by." Then Kate hated her more than ever.

"She despises me too much to dislike me," she

cried, hurrying down stairs. "She fears me so little that she sends him messages through me. How could I do her a good turn when it meant the end of my only chance of happiness?" Kate cried, in short, gasping sobs. "Is he living in a worse hell than I? Poor Dan! Oh, my poor Dan! I love him, and I have done him wrong! Just as if it mattered about her or me — about anything but his happiness."

Madame, who sat in the *conciergerie*, was startled by the sudden appearance of a beautifully dressed girl with a haggard face.

"Give me paper and pencil, quick — anything will do," said this lady; and Kate wrote: "I thought you might care to know that Dan went blind two weeks ago."

"Take that to Mademoiselle Meredith at once. Do you understand?" she said.

"*Oui, Madame.* I go at once — *à l'instant.*"

"But you are not going."

"I show Madame the door first; *permettez-moi.* This is Madame's *fiacre?*"

"Don't fail to let her have it," said Kate with feverish eagerness, as she pulled up the cab window.

"Madame may rely upon me. I go to stop *le petit Jean* from playing with the fire, and within four minutes Mademoiselle Meredith has the note."

It happened that *le petit Jean* had put the note in the fire. Madame boxed his ears soundly.

"*Mon dieu — quel enfant!*" she sighed, returning to her knitting. "But it can be of no great importance. If it had been from a man" — Madame shrugged her shoulders significantly.

A few days later Kate returned, to find that Winifred had gone to Russia.

She breathed quickly. "What did she do when you gave her my note?"

"Just this — '*Merci.*'" Madame gave an admirable imitation of Winifred's careless manner.

"And afterwards — you say she went to Russia, not to America?"

"It was Russia, I know, for she left her address."

Kate went out with a new look in her eyes. "It is my turn now," she said. "I sacrificed myself to save him; she took the best of his life, and left him in his hour of need. I can look her in the face now, for I am as worthy of him as she."

Winifred sat alone after Kate's visit, wondering why it had disturbed her so. She was troubled about Dan. Walter Garrison had written that he was well, and at work; but why had not Dan written himself?

Von Reidnitz came that afternoon to coach her for a new opera, and Winifred disliked him more than ever.

"You go to Russia?" he asked.

"Yes, this week."

"I have been away a month, and come back to this news. You never told me."

"Why should I have told you?"

There was an unpleasant look in the Austrian's eyes. Here was an unmarried woman, who saw him alone daily, and whose fingers he dared not kiss. Such women as these, women who met his eyes without thought of evil, and spoke to him without restraint, were beyond the bounds of his very questionable experience. Winifred was fearless; her careless power and splendid vitality attracted him, while her indifference and apparent coldness left him baffled and amazed.

Something of all this Winifred might have read in his eyes, had she cared to look; but though his personality sometimes disturbed her, she was more often unconscious of anything but his artistic possibilities.

She moved to the piano now. "We will go through the first act," she said.

"I did not come here for music."

"What then?"

Winifred's eyes silenced him. When he spoke again it was on a different subject.

"Mademoiselle," he began, "the last time I came here, I was insulted by one of your friends."

"How strange! Who was it?"

"Your American. I know not his name."

Winifred tried not to smile. "Oh, why did n't I hear it!" she thought. "What did he say to you?" she asked aloud.

"Let it suffice to know that he insulted me for the second time. I regret to tell you that he is a coward."

"A coward!" Winifred laughed.

"You laugh; you think it a small thing to be a coward."

She had never angered him more than at this minute.

"I offered him honorable redress," he continued.

"You challenged him — how absurd!" She laughed again. "It is like something on the stage. What did he do?"

"He refused."

"Of course. I suppose he laughed at you?"

"Americans laugh in strange places. I am, unfortunately, unable to share your merriment. He is a coward."

This time Winifred flushed. "Coward is not a

nice word," she said slowly, "and I think you have said it too often, Herr von Reidnitz. From this day you will consider these lessons at an end."

Herr von Reidnitz rose and bowed. "I hope the Fräulein will some day see fit to pardon."

"I do not pardon easily." Winifred spoke haughtily. She was unaccountably indignant, and felt that such musical criticism as he could give her would be too dearly bought.

Von Reidnitz hurried down stairs. "Ach, these Americans!" he muttered. "The women you think are free till you find they are only fearless! The men who laugh at the word a Frenchman would shoot you for! This girl is splendid, daring, charming, amazing, all at once. I was a fool to offend her for some day it would have been worth while to make her afraid."

It was among such men as these that Winifred passed with her serene pride untouched. Von Reidnitz had not reached the street before she had forgotten him, and his kind; but she sat long by the empty grate, thinking; and once she spoke to herself aloud.

"It is unkind of him not to write," she said.

Chapter XII

ON THE WAY

IT was a year later, and Winifred was coming home.

"The captain says we shall be over the bar by ten o'clock to-morrow," announced Edith.

She was arranging her hair before an infinitesimal mirror, and Winifred sat on the sofa looking out of the port-hole. The year had changed her, — taken something from her radiant confidence, drawn a tiny line between her brows, and brought a curious compression to the corners of her lips. Disappointment had not discouraged, but neither had it softened her. Her moments of silence were longer, her moments of expansion rarer, than when she went to Russia. She did not answer Edith's remark; but as Edith had said, "One would talk so very little if one talked only when sure of being answered by Win."

"I suppose we shall be in New York by midday," Edith continued. "When we left home five years ago we could not have afforded a stateroom

like this. You must at least be pleased by the money you have been able to make."

"Yes," said Winifred. "It helps while waiting for the real thing."

"Perhaps the 'real thing' will come this winter."

"If I have a chance to sing."

"The impresario promised it to you."

"What is an impresario's promise?"

"Not golden, certainly." Edith had finished, and sat watching Winifred's profile in the light that streamed through the port-hole.

"Win."

"Yes."

"When you have the real thing, what then?"

"I shall enjoy it."

"Will you? Sometimes I think you will not — for long."

"What do you suppose I am doing it for?"

"For the sake of doing it. Have you ever noticed that admiration is the thing you tire of most easily?"

"It is n't for admiration, it 's for power."

If Edith had no intellect, she possessed its best substitute — practical intuition.

"What do you mean, exactly, by power?" she asked.

Winifred evaded the question. "It is better than anything else life can give me," she said.

"It would be the least life could give me — power of that kind, I mean."

Edith still looked at the dark, irregular profile; a shadow she was learning to recognize brooded in Winifred's eyes.

"I wonder if you would confess something to me, now that we are talking frankly?" began Edith.

"I don't know."

"Have n't you been disappointed in Dan?"

"No." The answer came quickly, and then the shadow deepened in Winifred's eyes.

"He has never answered your letters, nor sent an explanation."

"Dan would never need to explain to me."

"How do you explain?"

"I don't explain, only I know that whatever Dan does is well done."

"It is not like you to believe in people so."

"Other 'people' are not Dan."

"Do you expect to see him, now that we are at home again?"

"It will be as he chooses."

Edith puckered her brows. "I did n't think Dan would give up like that," she complained.

"It destroys all one's ideas of fidelity. I don't know whom to believe in now."

"I believe in him as I always have, as I always shall. If he decided we had better be separated, he decided it as much for me as for himself. I would n't need letters to tell me that: he knows that I know."

Winifred rose. She had spoken with a ring of proud confidence in her voice.

"Where are you going?" asked Edith.

"Out," said Winifred.

As she passed along the deck, some men who stood in the smoking-room door commented upon her.

"Can you imagine those lips tremulous?" said one of them. "The mouth shows what you are, the eyes what you might have been. Have you ever noticed her eyes?"

"Yes, they are mysterious at times. Then again they have the frank, unspoiled gaze of a child. I wonder how long they will keep it."

"What does a woman with those eyes want of artificial lights, empty praises, and the drudgery of stage life?" said the first speaker impatiently.

An old man who smoked a little apart looked up suddenly. "I understand she has not made any striking success," he said.

"I believe not. That makes it all the more astonishing."

"Does it?" said the old gentleman with a quiet smile.

There was a little pause and then a comprehensive look.

"I think Mr. Rivers has hit the right nail," said one of the men. "You 're old-fashioned, Meriman. You can't stop the modern woman from doing."

"She would accomplish so much more if she would satisfy herself with being," growled Meriman. "Take the sister."

"The sister 's a dear little girl, no one denies that; but who can think of her when the other one is about?"

Winifred, unconscious of and indifferent to interested eyes, had flung herself down on a coil of rope in the bow of the steamer. The wild, salt wind blew cold in her face, and the waste of flowing waters suggested infinite things.

"Dan would have liked this." She sat long, and her eyes deepened and darkened. One of those moments when no self-deceit is possible had come to her. In this lonely sublimity of sky and sea she could not seem other than she was. She knew that she should always hold out empty hands

to life, though the flattery, the wealth, the power of the world were hers. She knew that she should be alone, though she lived and talked with men and women. Other women were happy, in friends, or lovers, or work, and Dan had spoken to her of what could make her happy, but she had never been able to love Dan as other women would have done. She had not loved him; but had always known that there could never be other man, other friend, other lover in her life than he. Some day she wanted him to know this, because in after years, when he ceased to love her, he might blame her for taking so much and giving so little; and this had been her only excuse, this knowledge of hers that if it could not be he it would be no one. Now he had gone out of her life, and none could take his place. It was best so; he would be happier in the end. For herself there would never be anything but her career, even though it left her with empty hands at the last.

But this was not what she had expected of life. It had looked so simple and joyous, on that June day five years ago when Dan had found her singing in the poppy garden. And now — she asked herself with startled wonder if she were not going to be an unhappy woman; but that was absurd, when one had youth, and health, and talent such

as hers. No, unhappiness was not the word; not for an instant would she acknowledge unhappiness — only nothing was very much worth while, and she was lonely, and she must be lonely all her life.

This was not her first moment of awakening, and she met it as she had met others. She rose and smiled a challenging smile straight into the heart of the setting sun. Life should give her what she chose, what would make it abundantly worth living. It was weak to consider unhappiness because the day was dying; it was morbid to fear loneliness because she was alone with the sky and sea.

She turned from the solitude to lighted cabins and the sound of chattering voices. Edith had been hunting for her.

"Have you forgotten the concert to-night?" she asked. "You promised to rehearse, and then you disappeared."

"I was in the bow; any one might have found me."

"Who would have thought of finding you in that windy spot! It was very imprudent of you."

Winifred clasped her hands behind her head, and laughed a low, defiant laugh.

"I do not care," she said. "Sometimes I dare not to care, and it is so nice."

"Which — daring, or not caring?"

"Both."

"How queer you are, Win! You are perfectly capable of spoiling the climax of your career by one of these crazy moods."

"I know it, but I am not going to spoil to-night. I am going to sing well. Wait."

A reaction had set in. Winifred's mood was reckless, confident, brilliant. She talked gayly as she dressed for the concert.

"After all," she said, "though a great operatic success must be a great thing, it might be just as good to be a red cross nurse on a post of danger in war time."

Edith sat on her berth and shivered. "I should n't mind being a nurse, but I should hate a post of danger," she said.

"The danger is what I should like, danger and a laugh in the teeth of it. It must be glorious. Only," she added reflectively — "only I probably should n't laugh, I should run away."

Edith sighed.

"Win, dear, sometimes I fear you are not at all the person for an opera singer."

Winifred laughed. "Wait till you hear me to-night," she said.

"Nobody will hear you if you keep on talking so much. There won't be a note left in your voice."

"Wait," she said, laughing again, and stood before the mirror with careless amusement. "I am glad I have n't beauty," she continued. "It is so much more triumphant to be able to do without it. I am going to take the geranium the captain gave you to-day, Edith. A red geranium is the only flower I don't like, it is so aggressive and blatant; but to-night I want it. I shall wear it in my hair — like this."

The effect was daring, and seemed part of what Edith called "one of Win's invincible moods."

In the saloon, Winifred, with her black hair and dress and her scarlet flower, created a sensation of which she was serenely conscious.

"What is she, an American, or a duchess, or both?" asked a passenger who appeared for the first time.

"An American, and an opera singer."

"Good heavens — an opera singer, you say?" A pair of lorgnettes went up. "But she is a lady."

"Undoubtedly."

"Then how can she" —

"She is so far above the dirt of the stage that she does n't see it."

"Ah. How long do you suppose that will last?"

"I don't know. She looks rather incorruptible, don't you think so?"

Winifred sat down near the door in a seat that old Mr. Rivers had found for her.

"You look well, my child," he said.

"Why do you call me a child?" asked Winifred. "Do you know that I am twenty-six?"

"That is young enough to be a child to me."

She smiled. "I am glad the parentage exists only in years. You would n't have let me go on the stage."

"You are right; I should not."

"You could n't have helped it," she said with mischievous defiance.

"Possibly not."

Edith came to say that the concert was about to begin; but Winifred announced her intention of staying where she was for the present.

"They make such dreadful music," she explained. "Are you going?" she asked of Mr. Rivers.

"No, I am not fond of music as a rule. I shall go to hear you sing, however."

She rested her elbows on the table, and with chin in hands looked at him for a short time in silence.

"I think you will be disappointed," she said finally.

"That depends upon what I expect."

"Don't you expect me to sing well?" She

looked surprised. "People always expect more of me than they find."

"That is on account of your confident air, Win," said Edith, who had also seated herself.

"Don't you expect me to sing well?" persisted Winifred ingenuously.

"Well — yes; not greatly."

"Why not?"

"You are still a child."

"That is the old story," she said impatiently. "Besides, it is n't altogether true." She thought of that sunset hour when she had been alone with the sky and sea. Looking out of the open door, she could see the deck slope into the night, and a solemn path of moonlight on the water.

"There are far better things for you than operatic success," said the old man. He spoke in undertones, for the concert had begun. "You worship power without understanding the deepest meaning of the word." He drummed on the table with his fingers and looked at her reflectively. "I should like you to know a particular friend of mine," he said.

"Why? What has he done?"

"Is n't it quite as important to ask what he is?"

"Well, what is he, then?" She smiled.

"Several things. Incidentally he is blind."

"Ah, how can blindness be an incident?"

"He makes it one. I think you would like him."

"Would he like me?" she asked, smiling.

"I do not know," he answered, smiling also. Then he continued seriously: —

"He went blind in the middle of his own speech."

"You don't mean he finished it?"

"He finished it."

Winifred drew a deep breath.

"How could he do it? How could he?" cried Edith.

"It would make life worth living just to have done a thing like that," said Winifred in a low voice.

"Which remark proves what I say about your inexperience," Mr. Rivers answered. "You are struck by the act, not by the pain."

"What has he done since then?"

"He has made himself one of the most prominent lawyers in the state. Just before I left Europe I heard of his having won the biggest law case that has appeared in the courts for some years."

"I wonder if I could ever meet him," Winifred said slowly.

"How terrible it must be to be blind! I can't bear to think of it," whispered Edith.

"Why do you think of it, then?" Winifred gave herself a mental shake. "Why do you think of it? There are so many pleasant things in the world. My sister is so foolish," she explained with a smile. "She is a great deal softer hearted than I am, yet she continually dwells on unfortunates. If I felt as badly as she does, I would never look at one or speak of one, unless, of course, I could do some good, and then I suppose I should feel obliged — As it is, unhappy people do not want me any more than I want them." She spoke lightly, with graceful defiance.

"That is why you don't sing better," said Mr. Rivers gravely.

But Winifred would not be grave. A mischievous devil laughed in her eyes. She drew a programme towards her and wrote rapidly on the back.

"What are you doing?" inquired Edith curiously.

"Beginning a new musical education. It seems necessary that I should enlarge my bump of compassion. How is this?" She read from her programme. "'Wanted. A lady desires to adopt poor boy or girl, cripple preferred.' I shall put it in the New York Herald the moment we land." Then she laughed and tore the paper in two. "No,

I don't like unfortunates. I leave them to Edith. Happiness and success are my chosen friends."

"How Dan would have hated to hear you talk so," said Edith reproachfully.

"I wonder if Mr. Rivers could tell us anything of him," said Winifred, laughing no longer.

"Who? Dan?"

"Yes." She looked up. "You are a lawyer and come from Massachusetts; do you know an old friend" —

A strange voice interrupted her.

"Miss Meredith, it is your turn to sing."

She consulted the programme. "There is one more number first. I will go after that. I want to ask a question."

"Very well, don't ask it too loud. Mrs. Bartlett's voice is easily extinguished."

She continued in a low tone.

"Do you know a Mr. Howard, a lawyer of the Massachusetts bar?"

"Why, that is the name of the man I was telling you of; could n't it be" —

"Of course not. Dan blind! What an idea. Don't you know more than one Howard?"

"I know only one of the Massachusetts bar. How long is it since you have seen your friend? Are you sure" —

"Of course I am. How persistent you lawyers are. Why, Dan is n't any more blind than you are! Perhaps you will recognize his full name. Daniel Maitland Howard. Your friend is probably some Jim Howard, or Jack Howard."

Mr. Rivers looked at her doubtfully.

"He is Daniel Maitland Howard," was the answer.

Edith gave a little cry.

Winifred was leaning forward on the table. She did not stir or speak, but the color went drop by drop from her face till Mr. Rivers was frightened.

"Miss Meredith, it is your turn to sing."

She rose mechanically.

Edith was crying.

"Be quiet!" commanded Winifred fiercely. "It is n't Dan — it can't be Dan."

Two of the men who had discussed Winifred in the afternoon watched her entrance now.

"Look at Miss Meredith," said Meriman quickly. "Good heavens! what 's wrong? Is it the electric light, or the scarlet flower?"

"By Jove!" exclaimed the other, putting on his glasses, "what a change! It 's neither light nor flower. Look at her lips. I 'll wager she does n't sing."

Winifred faced a hundred eyes. The pallor of

her face was startling beside the black dress and the cruel red of a scarlet geranium.

"Is she going to faint? Is she stage-struck?" whispered some one.

"Stage-struck — that woman? Nonsense! I did n't know she was so tall, did you?"

Edith played the opening bars of the accompaniment, but Winifred made no sound. She played them again, and Winifred caught her throat.

"I can't," she whispered. "I can't breathe. It may be Dan."

Chapter XIII

HOME

MR. RIVERS awaited Winifred's return. He had known she would not sing.

"I wonder if Dan Howard knows — or cares," he asked himself.

Very soon Winifred stood before him with fiercely questioning eyes.

"I must know if it is Dan," she said.

"We will telegraph Mr. Garrison to-morrow." Edith spoke soothingly.

"I must know to-night."

Mr. Rivers placed a chair for her, and addressed himself to Edith. "Walter Garrison is Howard's most intimate friend," he said. "They lived together for years on Beacon Hill."

"Then it is our Dan." Edith gave a little sob. "Poor Dan, how dreadful!" Winifred said nothing. She was strangely still and white and breathless.

Looking at her, Mr. Rivers asked himself what part this woman played in Daniel Howard's life.

"I did not know he was such an old friend of yours, or I should have broken the news less brutally." He continued to address Edith. "Mr. Howard lost his eyesight about two years ago, but since then he has won more admiration than pity. I don't think his friends should grieve for him overmuch."

"He might have told us," said Edith. And then some men came up to ask if Winifred was feeling better, and if there was nothing to be done for her.

Winifred was not feeling better, and there was nothing to be done.

"It is only a little faintness," Edith assured them. She longed to go away and cry; but it would n't be fair to leave Winifred looking like this. She had never looked so before, and Edith was startled. Why did n't Win speak, or move, or cry? This stillness of hers made every one uncomfortable.

The men lingered. "I heard you speaking of Dan Howard just now," said one of them. "Did you know he had won his great case?"

Mr. Rivers nodded assent.

"I had a letter from an eye-witness just before I sailed," continued the speaker. "It must have been worth seeing and hearing. They say there

was n't a dry eye in the court. Howard has an odd power of moving people when he chooses. I suppose his personal experience helps somewhat. You always feel the man must have suffered hideously."

Mr. Rivers rose and turned out the light that shone on Winifred's face.

"I wonder if you 're speaking of the Dan Howard I knew in college," said another man. "He was in my class of '84."

"I think that 's the one — a tall, loosely hung fellow with a face you might n't like, but could n't forget."

"Yes — and over fond of his own way. It must be the same. And he 's gone blind? That boy! He used to play half-back on the 'Varsity eleven. He was the roughest player on the team, and now he 's blind. Good heavens! Poor old Howard! What does it make of him?"

"He is one of the men who are always bigger than the occasion."

"He used to be when he played football, but what can a man do when he can't see to keep out of the gutter?"

"Wait till you meet him. It is rather odd, the impression he gives of being a larger force than you, even while you lend him the guidance of your hand."

"I wonder why he did n't shoot himself before it came to that," said Dan's old classmate reflectively, as he passed out to the moonlit deck.

"When you see him, perhaps you will understand."

"I don't know. I suppose he is changed."

"I doubt if you would know him."

The voices were lost in the distance.

"Come to bed, Win," said Edith.

Mr. Rivers put his hand over hers. "My child." He spoke with grave tenderness.

Winifred shivered, and rising, she went out alone into the night.

The next day she stood opposite Walter Garrison in the private parlor of a Fifth Avenue hotel.

"I do not understand," she was saying slowly. "You were his friend, and you left him."

She spoke with pale lips, and her face was without color or life.

"If you will let me I should like to explain," said Walter.

"It can hardly be worth while," she answered wearily.

"Pardon me, Miss Meredith, it is worth while."

Walter was not angry; he knew too well the

loyalty of his own heart and actions, but he had certain things to say and he meant to say them.

She listened to him on sufferance, with a strangely still face and inscrutable eyes.

"Dan got me the position himself," continued Walter in his slow, gentle way, "because he knew it would help me to earn a living, and give me a chance of winning the woman I love. I would have given up that chance — for Dan, but I could not force the sacrifice upon him. To accept from others seemed the one intolerable thing" — Here Walter broke off suddenly. "You know Dan," he added in a lower tone. "It was for his own sake that I left him."

An almost imperceptible tremor passed over the stillness of her face, and he saw that she understood.

"Where is he?" she asked.

Walter became suddenly ill at ease. "He is taking a vacation at Lilton," he said.

"At Lilton?" It was the home of Winifred's childhood.

"I think he is staying with your aunt," he added.

Winifred was silent for a moment; then —

"Telegraph her that I shall be at Lilton to-morrow," she said.

Edith entered the room in time to hear the last remark.

"Why, Win, you are crazy," she exclaimed. "You can't leave New York now; there are contracts to sign, and fifty things to be done about your début."

Walter had taken out his note-book. "What train shall I tell her to meet?" he asked quietly. He was smiling under his beard.

"Why do you want to go to Lilton, of all places?" said Edith.

"Dan is there," answered Winifred.

Chapter XIV

THE CLOSED DOOR

DAN was blind, and though Winifred stood before his face for a thousand years, he would never look into her eyes again. The journey was an agony of weariness and impatience — Dan was waiting.

At last she stood on the platform of the little country station; but there was no one to meet her. The station-master regarded her with suspicion as he locked the ticket office, and when she asked for a carriage to drive to Mrs. Sumner's place, suspicion changed to contempt.

"I guess you be a stranger in these parts," he said. "Mrs. Sumner's place went in the crash when old Meredith died; she has been living on Mr. Howard's estate ever since."

"Mr. Howard's estate!" repeated Winifred.

"Why, yes; Mr. Howard bought the Meredith estate soon after the old man died, five years ago. If you be going that way, you might as well take along this telegram which came for Mrs. Sumner

yesterday noon." He thrust a bit of yellow paper into her hand; it was her own telegram. She looked at it dully. So after all she was not expected, and it was Dan who had bought her place; it was owing to him that she had been cleared of debt, owing to him that she had been able to go abroad and gratify her heart's desire.

"Be you feeling bad?" asked the man, struck by her pallor, and partially mollified by the importance of giving information. "If you don't feel like walking, I can hitch up and take you over to Mr. Howard's place 's well 's not."

"I will walk," she told him.

The way was the old familiar one of her childhood; but memory was blotted out by the thought that she was near Dan again. Only once she stopped to lean against a huge oak, for it was here that he had first told her of his love. She remembered well a sense of rebellion at his calm assumption of mastery. "What makes you so sure of winning me?" she had asked him. "The strength of my need of you," he had answered. In those days she had wondered that any one person should need another.

She was then a girl of fifteen, ambitious, happy, and confident. She stood to-day a woman in the prime of her youth, in the pride of her success, but

her lips were pale with the strangeness and bitterness of pain. Of what she would say to Dan and of why she went to him, she did not pause to think. He was in trouble, and she must be with him; that was all.

With dim eyes she walked up the well-remembered avenue, and stood by the gate where Dan had leaned one springtime many years ago, watching her as she sang.

A sunbonnet bobbed among the withered flowers now, and under it the pale, worn little face of her aunt looked up with a cry of surprise.

"Winnie, my dear, is it you? I thought you were thousands of miles away. I was asking Dan only the other day whether" —

"Dan is still here?"

"Oh, yes, poor fellow. You must n't be shocked to find him changed."

Winifred had a sense of suffocation.

"Where is he?" she asked.

"Don't see him yet, dearie. You look ill. Perhaps the sun was too" —

"Where is Dan?"

"I think he is on the back piazza, but" —

Winifred swept by her aunt without a word. Swiftly she passed up the steps, through the long

hall, and to the veranda beyond, where Dan sat alone. Swiftly she went to him with a low cry.

"Dan! Dan!"

He rose to his feet. "Winifred!" was all he said, and he put out his hand to her.

"Oh, Dan, what can I say to you? What can I say?"

He could not speak, for the sudden touch and sound of her was more than he could bear.

She saw that the face above hers was lined and seamed; her breath came broken with sobs.

"You never told me — you never told, you let me find it out from a stranger. When I heard — I thought my heart would break." She quivered, and clung to the hands that held hers.

"Dan, Dan," she cried again, and then because of her weakness he found his strength.

He put her gently but firmly from him.

"You must n't mind so much, Win," he said. "You 'll get used to it after a little, though it 's puzzling at first, I admit. Won't you sit down? There must be a chair round here somewhere. Why did n't you let me know you were coming? You startled me."

For his sake she tried to steady her voice; but it was hard to breathe while standing before Dan's

sightless eyes, and an attempt to tell him of the telegram ended in terrible, convulsive sobbing.

"I cannot bear it — I cannot. Dan, you are strong — tell me how to bear it; I cannot bear it — alone."

The utter abandonment of her grief, the strength and violence of it startled him, and passion was forgotten in tenderness. He made his way to her.

"Dear child, I cannot have you so troubled about me," he said.

She clung to his hand. "There must be some hope," she cried. "There must be some help in the world — somewhere; did you try to find it? Dan, it is breaking my heart; tell me there is hope."

"Would it have been like me to give in without a struggle?" he said quietly.

Her wild passion of weeping frightened him. He bent over her, and putting his hand on her bowed head, spoke with grave command.

"Win," he called, "Win." She seemed comforted by the touch of his hand on her hair.

"Win, you must stop," he said in his deep voice. Then as her sobbing grew quieter he went on, "I cannot tell you what your sympathy is to me; I will not try. You have given proof of your deep,

tender heart, and I hope the time is not far off when you will know the happiness of finding some one worthy of the great love it is in you to give."

She stopped crying suddenly, and having done his duty, Dan, with a white, drawn face, groped his way back to his chair.

She put out her hand and touched his arm. "Did you know, that time in Paris?" she asked.

"Know what? Oh, that I was going to be blind? Yes, I knew then."

"And you never told me! Why not, Dan?"

He hesitated. "There were many reasons."

"Could any of them have made it kind to have kept it from me? Did all our years together go for nothing?"

"That was just it, Win; they went for nothing. We had come to the parting of the roads."

"And did you think we could part with the roads?"

Dan straightened himself. "The poor child feels she owes me something," he thought.

Then with a shudder of indignation he asked himself if she could be thinking of making the great sacrifice; if she could think he would use her beautiful life to keep him from tripping in the dark.

He had never seen tears in her eyes, and now

her voice had come to him broken with sobs; he had felt her tears on his hand, and her fingers had clung to his in weakness and appeal. Her grief was for him, her pity, her new tenderness for him, and his temptation was almost more than he could bear.

A certain affection she had always given him, and her love he knew he could win — even now; for the pendulum of his inner life swung as strongly and boldly as ever. What she felt to-day was only pity; but in after years — he set his teeth — it was too late!

There was silence between them, and in the autumn fields. Once a crow called from a hay rick, and some withered leaves dropped from the woodbine.

Winifred looked into Dan's face; she could only guess at the bitterness of an infirmity that had been worn before thousands of eyes, at the agony of a humiliation regarding which austere lips were proudly silent. In the rugged lines of that face she read no resignation; but something of proud patience. The brows were graver, the mouth unconquerable as ever.

In the silence, Winifred looked, understood, and stepped royally and gladly into her own. "I love him," she said in her soul, and was dumb with

the wonder and joy of it. "I love him," and she wanted to cry it aloud, she wanted the stars to hear. She rose and stood by him, and it seemed to her that he must know.

"Dan, do you remember our grainfield with the wind and sun on it?" she asked softly.

Yes, Dan remembered. Why must she remind him of that? in those days there had been light — O God! there had been light. He had heard her move towards him, and her nearness in the dark was a torture.

"It would have been better to have told me," she was saying.

"To have told" —

"What was coming to you."

"It was best for me to pass from your life, as you must pass from mine."

In his pain he spoke harshly. He felt that this interview must end, or he could not answer for his manhood.

Winifred was speaking again, and there was a bewildering sweetness in her voice. "Won't you come out into the woods with me?" she said. "There is a stillness, and a glory, and a wonder in them, that is more to be felt than seen, and autumn leaves are dropping through the silence, and the nuthatches are calling. Don't you remember how

we used to hear them when we were boy and girl together?"

At any price — let Winifred think what she would — this must end. Dan's face grew resolute, and his moment of weakness was past.

"I don't think you understand me, Winifred," he began almost sternly. "The past is gone, trodden down and sealed. You are to think of me as if I had never been."

Winifred drew back from him, startled. Dan had never spoken to her with this voice.

"Shall I put it plainer; or do you understand?"

"I don't think I do, Dan — quite."

He had said he hoped she would love some other man. It was for his honor's sake to renounce all claims; but now he was speaking as if he did not love her. His voice was deep, quiet, resolute.

"Most of my early life was passed trying to make you love me."

"Yes, Dan."

"The great thing I feel gratitude for to-day is that you never loved me."

"Yes, Dan," and now her answer was little more than a whisper. She put out her hand as if to ward off a blow.

"One word more. The part of that past that related to my love for you has no longer a mean-

ing. I have ceased to expect, ceased to wish any woman to love me, or to be my wife. You are quite sure you understand me, Winifred?"

She was looking at him with wide, terrified eyes, and parted lips. She was numb, and dumb, and breathless, — a dethroned queen, — an agonized woman. It was all over, then; she had learned her love too late, and must pay the price.

"You are sure you understand me?" Dan said again.

He must never know — Winifred found her voice, and answered him quietly — through white lips.

"I think I understand it all," she said. "Good-by, Dan."

He paused a moment before speaking, then — "Your aunt will be alone here after to-morrow," he told her. "It would be a pleasure to me if you could still feel that this was your home. I only bought it to hold for you."

"That was like you, Dan; but I think I had better go." She paused and looked at him — in his face she could see no sign of weakness, nor doubt, nor need of her love. Suddenly she turned, and passed through the garden, and down the well-remembered avenue to the high road beyond. Not once did she look back.

Dan sat on, motionless, in the sunny silence where she had left him. The world was very still. Now and then crows cawed from the meadow as they had done in the moment of his temptation, and once he felt a withered leaf drop on his hand. For a long time he sat there, then his lips moved and two tears — the terrible tears of a strong man — came slowly into his eyes.

Chapter XV

WINIFRED PAYS HER DEBT

TO doubt Dan's love was like doubting the existence of suns and moons, and Winifred doubted this love in the very hour of pain and glory when she recognized her own.

Suffering was startling, bewildering, hideous, and she struggled with it as a new-born child fights with air. This was on the long journey home, when she sat in silence through hours of darkness, and saw the stars fade and the waning moon climb a sky that was gray with dawn. Then Winifred prayed.

There had been a time when Dan and she had stood under a waning moon, when he had looked into her eyes and spoken his love; but that was an æon ago. He could never look into her eyes again, or see the light of moon or sun. There had come to him what was worse than any death, and there had come to her —

When the day was bright, those who traveled with her saw a still, white-faced woman, beside

whom it seemed best not to sit. Within herself Winifred was wondering how it was that, suffering so, she lived.

Edith met her at the door of her own room, and a pair of questioning eyes had to be parried. She turned a cold cheek to her sister's lips.

"You saw him, Win?"

"Yes."

"How — how is he?"

"He is blind."

Winifred shivered as she put Edith from her. Then she caught sight of her own face in the mirror, and paused; for it was not so that she had looked yesterday, or on any other day of her life, and Edith must not know.

She sat with her back to the light, and removed her veil deliberately. Edith was nervous and restrained. She played with her handkerchief, and started several times, without success, to speak.

"Is it true about Kate?" she ventured at last.

"About Kate?" repeated Winifred. After all it might be well to talk of Kate, of everything in the world, save that which was more than this world or the next.

"What is it about Kate?" she asked.

Edith seemed puzzled, and a little tremulous.

Her eyes questioned Winifred, but Winifred's fingers were composedly busy with her hair.

"What about Kate?" she repeated.

"Nothing — I suppose, or he would have told you."

"Who?"

"Dan."

The busy fingers paused; but only for an instant, for Winifred saw the danger signal, and the instinct of self-preservation was strong within her. She was dreaming or insane; but in her eyes, looking at her from the glass, there was that which no one must know.

"What should he have told me of Kate?" she asked.

"Only whether he — I mean if it is true what people say."

"What do people say?"

Edith had suspected herself to be treading on a charged mine; but if Win could speak in such a tone, it was all right.

"Of course it's only gossip, or he would have told you," she continued more easily. "Only they say Kate is no longer the same person; she has given up society, and she and Dan" —

"She and Dan?" questioned Winifred quietly Assuredly she was dreaming.

"She and Dan are together a good deal; that is, they go to concerts, and he sees nothing of any one else, so of course people talk."

"I see; they say Dan is going to marry her."

Winifred leaned her chin on her hand; she felt an hysterical desire to laugh. So it was Kate — Kate Randolph — whom Dan had despised, and she had laughed at.

"I think Kate has loved Dan all her life," Edith was saying.

Yes; Winifred saw it all now, a thousand long-forgotten words and looks flashed through her consciousness. Kate had loved him all her life, but she too had loved him, and on looking back, she could remember no time when she had not loved him, only she had never known her heart till it had been half broken. Kate was wiser, and to Kate —

Edith was still talking. Herr Grün had sent a message that morning to the effect that Winifred could have a hearing at the Cosmopolitan Opera House at half past three, on the afternoon of Thursday next. He wished to hear her sing "Lucia," or if not that, then a scene from "Traviata," and if she were not there at the exact hour, another would take her place.

"He will probably be an hour late himself,"

remarked Edith wisely, "but you must be there on time. The message was rather high-handed, but I suppose you had better accept the terms."

Winifred said she supposed so too; and then, at last, she was alone. So this was all that was left her. The life of an opera singer, — work without success, or valueless triumph. She had lost Dan's love — lost it through her own fault, and the rest of her life must pay the price. And Dan was blind; she had stood unseen before his face, as the world of men must forever stand. Winifred moaned and shivered, thinking of the pity, the loneliness, the horror of it. What was her own life, or death, or pain, to this? But she could have made him happy once, for a few years before the darkness came, and after — it would have been enough to answer his loss with the devotion of her life, and well she knew she could have kept his love, for there was no mystery of his nature which she could not understand, no depth or height where she could not meet him.

But Kate — Kate Randolph! Winifred heard a step in the next room. No one must see her or speak to her now. She crossed swiftly, and locking the door leaned against it, panting. To-morrow she would find strength to face the world; but this hour was hers.

Once or twice she felt she must be going mad: she was afraid of her own thoughts; but she was more afraid of the eyes that looked from the mirror, for in them she saw what must be with her to the end of her life.

When the darkness came to hide the eyes, she was glad; but the night was hideous. Once or twice she slept from exhaustion, and once she dreamed that she struggled with a great flood — struggled, cried out, and was drowning, when Dan caught her in strong arms, strove against the waters with her, and laughed, and kissed her on the lips. Then she awoke. Sunlight was coming through the window, and another day was ready for her.

She rose to meet it with pale lips that faltered no longer. Life must be lived, and she would live it proudly and strongly, though it might not hold another hour of happiness.

Chapter XVI

TOO LATE

APART from her love for Dan and the selfish pain of it, there was the knowledge of his misfortune which roused all that was in her of divine womanhood; and this very tenderness, this aching pity, saved her from becoming hard and embittered. In the days that followed she spoke little, and the lonely eyes asked for no sympathy; but in a new gentleness and thought of others she paid unconscious tribute to the exquisite and glorified service that might have been hers. Outwardly she lived as the rest of the world, doing such work as there was to do, and smiling when others smiled; but at night she would lie looking into the darkness, and pray fiercely, "O God, kill me — kill me!"

Dan had said, "Don't pray for a breaking of the law, Win," and this was the law — that he should be blind, and under the solemn hand of his fate, in the loneliness and darkness of his life, should find that which made herself and love seem small.

But Kate — how could there be room for Kate?

She had loved him always and given freely what Winifred denied; and if in the ruin of his hopes he had stooped to lift the one remaining gift, who was she — Winifred — to blame him? But it was not like Dan to stoop, and though she might have lost his love, she knew that to no other woman would it be given. For herself there would be no other love than Dan, no other husband, or lover; but she had her career, and in pursuit of this Winifred never wavered. Gladden existence it could not; justify it to some extent it could, and did.

Her manager was anxious about her. "It would seem as if the climate of New York did not agree with you," he said once; "your voice is bad to-day and good to-morrow. How do you expect to make a success of your début?"

"It *must* be a success."

"Must — must" — He shrugged his shoulders impatiently. "How is it to be accomplished, this 'must' of which you Americans are so fond?"

"But you said the other day when I sang the 'Ave Maria' that there was something in my voice that had not been there before."

"Yes, I have not forgotten. You made me want to be good, and I do not often want that — to be good. It is true you have something that is new to you; but you cannot command it, it is here to-

day and gone to-morrow. That is not the way to become great."

The man left Winifred toying absently with her music. Her career was all she had, little enough, but all; and in the immediate present, success was threatened by more or less sleepless nights and days of misery. Suddenly she looked up, and Kate Randolph stood in the doorway.

During a moment of silence the two women faced each other. Kate saw, not the cool, buoyantly confident girl she remembered, but a still, pale woman, with sensitive lips, and eyes that were as depth upon depth of shadow.

Winifred came forward and put out her hand; then she saw that in Kate's face was more of sadness and less of bitterness than there had been two years ago, and Kate's eyes no longer looked at her with reluctant respect, but fairly, as one looks at an equal or an inferior.

"Are you ill, Winifred?" asked Kate quietly.

Winifred moved a chair to the fire. "Won't you sit down?" she said. "Edith is out, but I hope you can stay and see me. No, I am not ill."

Kate seated herself, and unbuttoned her coat, talking the while as rapidly, but not so naturally, as usual.

"What a charming parlor you have! I suppose

you are great now — what, not great? I have n't heard you sing, you see. You are advertised to appear this winter, and when you do, quite a party of us are coming on to hear you. We only left Boston yesterday, and are going back at once."

Kate paused; she had come into the room fearing and respecting Winifred too little to dislike her — for had she not deserted Dan in his time of trial? But Winifred was holding her with still, dark eyes, and though she must be heartless, and ungrateful, and vain, there was that in her personality which made Kate feel at a disadvantage, and chatter foolishly in self-defense.

Winifred watched her gravely. She rarely exerted herself to make conversation, but just now she wanted to keep Kate, and questioned her about unimportant matters, such as mutual acquaintances, and the success of the grand opera troupe on its visit to Boston. Kate answered eagerly to hide her unaccountable nervousness.

"'La Mira' was the favorite," she said, "but every one did n't like her. Dan thought" — she caught her breath, startled that this name should have been spoken between them.

After a moment's pause Winifred said quietly, "You are with him often?"

"Yes," answered Kate.

Winifred did not move; but now she looked at Kate hungrily. "How is he?" she asked.

"I am afraid he works too hard," said Kate. When she spoke of Dan, there was a new look in her face. Winifred saw it. Perhaps Kate could give him something of happiness, and if so —

Because they both loved him, and because he was blind, the barriers between them were falling. Their questions and answers came slowly, as things from the depths will.

"Have you seen him, Winifred?"

"Yes." She grew paler as she said it.

"I mean since" —

"Yes," said Winifred again.

"Did you think he had changed — much?" questioned Kate, almost in a whisper.

Winifred did not answer, but she turned her face so that her cheek rested against the high-backed chair. It was a movement oddly suggestive of pain. Kate was startled, and began to watch her strangely.

"He is more like himself than he was a year ago," she said.

"Were you with him soon after — his sight went?" questioned Winifred without moving.

"No; he would n't see any of us at first. I think he suspected us of wanting to be kind — because we pitied him."

"I know," whispered Winifred. Then she turned her eyes to Kate's face, and in that look the barriers went down. They were two women loving the same man, and neither was ashamed. Kate spoke suddenly with low-voiced, tremulous passion.

"But you went to Russia, Winifred; you left him when he needed you, and only you in all the world."

"It was only two months ago that I heard," answered Winifred.

"That you heard" —

"That he was blind."

The beating of Kate's heart was suffocating. Winifred was strangely still.

"But my letter" —

"What letter?"

"The one I wrote in Paris — you *must* remember. You know the time I saw you. Dan was blind then, and I knew it. I meant to tell you, only — only I could n't; so I wrote instead."

"You wrote me — two years ago — that he was blind?"

"Yes, yes! you *must* have received it, Winifred. The *concierge* took it herself; she told me you had it — and you went to Russia just the same."

"I never saw the letter," said Winifred, and again she turned away her face, with closed eyes.

There was a silence, and then Kate cried out piteously, —

"Winifred! Winifred! — if you had seen the letter, would you have come back?"

But Winifred did not answer, and the moveless profile outlined against the chair told nothing.

'Dan thinks you knew — two years ago," continued Kate.

"It is no matter now," said Winifred.

"Shall I tell him how it was?"

"It is no matter now," repeated Winifred. Then she turned and looked at Kate.

"Why did n't you tell me, instead of writing?" she asked.

"Because I hated you — and because I have loved Dan all my life," said Kate. "Afterwards I wrote, because I loved him more than I hated you, and if you would make him happy" —

Winifred rose, and walked to and fro across the room. Kate watched her with her hand at her side. Since Winifred loved Dan, it was all over for her, and there was a look of wild misery in her eyes. Suddenly Winifred paused by her chair.

"Kate," she said gently.

Kate looked up to meet grave, deep eyes and smiling lips. Winifred was holding out her hand.

"I wish you would try not to hate me any

longer," she said. "I have been a hard woman — an unkind one often, I am afraid; but perhaps I have been most unkind to myself, and that should make it easier to forgive me, Kate." She smiled again. The hand that held Kate's was firm, and the steady voice low and thrilling. "Perhaps some day you will tell Dan of the lost letter," she continued; "I don't like to have him think his oldest friend could be so unkind as to have kept silent during these two years. You will tell him?" The last words were more a command than a request.

"Yes," answered Kate tremulously, as she rose.

"And you will not keep on hating me always?"

Kate looked up.

"I never knew you before," she said with a dry, choking sob. "I might have known — I might have known he could never care for me, after loving you."

Chapter XVII

THE WORLD'S VIEW

IT was during these first winter months that Walter Garrison won the desire of his life: Edith Meredith returned his love.

"I thought," she confided to him, "that you would never find it out."

"Did you find it out about me — about my caring, I mean?" he asked with a lover's incoherence.

She raised her head from his shoulder to look at him. "Stupid," she said, and nestled back into her former position. "Stupid," she repeated. "Why, I knew it ages and ages ago."

"No! did you, though!" he exclaimed with honest surprise. "How many ages ago?" and this involved a discussion as to the precise moments in which certain words, looks, and feelings had come to pass.

"Why did n't you ask me before?" she inquired audaciously.

"I was afraid you would say no."

"Afraid! Nonsense! A man should never be afraid. Poor Dan never was — he told Win he loved her every minute he was with her."

"Did she repeat his words to you?" asked Walter indignantly.

"Of course not! She would never talk of him, but have n't I eyes and ears? and as for words, do you think words are the only things with which to say 'I love'?"

Edith hesitated. There was one point which she felt almost afraid to approach with Walter, but on this occasion she ventured.

"Is he going to marry Kate?" she asked.

Walter crossed his knees and looked gloomily at the toe of his boot.

"I don't know," he answered.

"What do you think?"

"I don't know," he said again.

"It destroys all one's ideas of constancy; I can't believe in any one now," complained Edith.

Walter frowned. "Dan is not to blame," he said. "Your sister took the best he had for the best part of his life, and gave him nothing back. Dan 's not to blame."

"No, dear, of course not. Did I ever say he was?"

Walter continued an obstinate defense of his

friend in the longest sentence he was ever heard to make.

"She gave him nothing. God knows what she made him suffer, and what he has had to suffer from life since, and what he must suffer till he dies. And now, if there comes a woman who gives him all Winifred denied him, he is blamed for taking it. Do you ever think of the loneliness of blindness, Edith?"

"Yes, dear; and will you think of something else — Win's eyes when his name is mentioned."

Walter recrossed his knees, and looked at the toe of his other boot.

"Have you noticed?" asked Edith.

He nodded.

"She loves him, Walter."

"Yes," he assented gravely.

"Now that you have got over being angry with me for blaming Dan — which I never did — tell me what we can do about it?"

"We can't do anything; I know Dan."

"He is going to marry Kate."

Walter tugged at his mustache.

"Dan's a fool," he said gloomily.

"Does he" — began Edith, and paused.

"I don't know."

"It is terrible — two such lives being ruined

through a misunderstanding! Could n't you ask him — could n't you tell him " —

" I should like to see any one try," he said emphatically.

" I should never dare to say anything to Win," acknowledged Edith. " She and Dan are the kind who must make or spoil their own lives; no one can help or save them. But it 's terrible! They were made for each other."

A few days later, Walter announced his intention of going to tell Dan of his engagement.

" Oh, Walter, must you? How long will it take? " cried Edith, much distressed.

" I can go one night and come back the next."

" Then I cannot see you for a whole day. Why not write to him? "

" And have Stirling read it? "

That was of course impossible, and Walter went.

" I think I am a little, just a little, jealous of Dan," said Edith, while Walter's arms held her in a good-by embrace. " I used to think when I first knew you, that you would never care for any woman as you cared for him."

" I used to think so too."

" And now — no, don't kiss me — and now? "

" Now I do."

"As much — no, you can't kiss me yet — only as much ? or more ? "

"More," answered Walter with a deep breath.

When he arrived in Boston, Walter was told that Dan had gone out of town to interview a sick client, but was expected back during the early afternoon. So he renewed old associations, and several of his classmates lunched with him at the club.

Of Dan he heard different accounts. Some spoke of him as the greatest lawyer in the state, but reproached him for sternness and coldness in his personal relations. It was agreed that Stirling, the little secretary, would give his life as a stepping-stone to anything his employer might need, from which it was argued that Dan must have his moments of relenting. But many there were who feared him, or felt uncomfortable before the immense reserve and gravity of his personality. Except in court his words were few, and the dryly humorous smile that sometimes crossed his face never softened it.

It was agreed that in this one winter he had withdrawn more than ever into himself, and that human intercourse with him became increasingly difficult.

If his acceptance of his lot were plucky, it was

said to be unchristian; but then it was a well known fact that Dan Howard was not a churchman, and had refused all religious consolation. Upon this there ensued a discussion concerning the meaning of the word religion, and many things were said of an unorthodox nature. One man claimed that the church was only for those who were not strong enough to do without it; and this statement provoked an angry retort, to the effect that it was just like Daniel Howard to think he was stronger than any one else, and the argument reached that point where each man feels a contrary opinion to be a personal grievance.

Walter took no part in the conversation. The days when a blow answered abuse of Dan were over, and when it came to words, Dan had many more eloquent defenders than he.

He left the table with a heavy heart and wrote to Edith, an occupation which afforded him infinite consolation, although he knew that the letter could not reach her before he did. It was a long letter, but the writing of it did not occupy him till the hour of Dan's arrival. So he wandered aimlessly about the streets, pausing at old landmarks and recalling the days of his lifelong friendship with Dan. There were the early memories of him, a wild, whimsically reckless boy; and then, in the

pride of his youthful arrogance, as the roughest player on the eleven, the hero of "bloody Monday night." Later there came the shadow of Winifred and a grim settling of lips and jaw as Dan recognized his life's object. Then followed years of unwavering pursuit of the goal, a fearless challenge of results, and finally the awful hour when the heavens crashed through his life, leaving it in ruins. After the first moments of fear and horror he had turned his face resolutely towards the waste spaces in which he must walk the rest of his days, and no one had seen him falter. Walter knew that the reserve and apparent coldness were assumed as an armor, an evidence of the untamable pride that had been his in his youth. The change in him this winter could only be accounted for by this advent of Winifred, which had brought an added strain to bear on his powers of endurance.

Even thoughts of Edith could not quiet the ache in Walter's heart as he neared his old friend's office.

Chapter XVIII

THE FRIEND'S VIEW

"YES, Mr. Howard had returned," the clerk told him. He was in the inner office dictating to a stenographer, and through the open door Walter could see him. He looked tired, and older; there was some gray in his hair that surely had not been there in the autumn, but there was more than this, and Walter did not wonder that some feared the tragedy of that granite hewn face with its sightless eyes. And this was Dan, who had dared so much and whose hopes had been so high.

Walter would not interrupt him. "I will wait till he finishes this piece of work," he said in a low voice. But Dan raised his head suddenly, and stopped dictating.

"Who is in the outer office?" he called, and Walter was forced to declare himself.

There was no lack of warmth in the powerful grip of Dan's hands. "I am awfully glad to see you — hear you, I mean," he said heartily. "When do you go back?"

"To-night. Can't you knock off work soon?"

"There's only one letter to finish. I can be with you in a moment."

Walter waited while last affairs were concluded. There were questions to ask and answer, and a garrulous client came in with a grievance. Being Saturday, the clerks were anxious to go, and the delay caused confusion and impatience. Dan sat unmoved in the midst of it all, directing, controlling, quieting, without a sign of impatience or hurry.

"I notice you never swear now," Walter said, as they went out into the street together. "Is it the result of special virtue?"

"No, it is the result of inadequacy. If I could find an oath big enough, I should use it. But I don't believe the man who invented swearing ever went blind. Tell me about yourself, Wally. You don't know how good it is to hear your voice again."

Yes, Dan had grown older. Walter did not want to tell his happiness to that worn face.

"You are working too hard," he said. "What's the use?"

"It's the only way. It keeps me tired, and then I don't feel so young."

"Where is Stirling?"

"Gone to see his mother and sister. Imagine having a mother and sister to go to!"

It would have been better had Dan been cold, as the world thought him. How could Walter tell this lonely man of his love and happiness?

"I should n't have thought of you as domestic, exactly," he said.

"No, I suppose I get weak-minded sitting in the dark."

"Is Stirling still satisfactory?"

"Yes. I don't know what I should do without him; he is a good boy, but he has his limitations."

Dan smiled and his face softened amazingly.

"Stirling and I have queer experiences," he continued. "Sometimes when I am in the country I have a foolish hankering to know if the sky is blue. Stirling often describes it as brown. I am hardly an authority on color, but I do know that no sky ever was brown. Then he tells me the Green Mountains look green, which is the one and only color they never are. I told him his sense of color was defective, and that I should have to send him to an art school. Of course he took the remark seriously, as he takes everything, and feared he should not be able to find time for such study. By what followed I imagine the threat troubled him, and the next time I asked how the country looked,

I was amazed to hear him launch — doubtfully at first — into a description of such extravagant picturesqueness and variety of color and form as I know never existed among our New England hills. I wanted to laugh, but thought better of it; and then began to wonder where I had heard something like this before. At last, it came to me — he was quoting Walter Scott! The poor boy, probably distressed by his inability to satisfy me, had gone to an authority on nature, and leaving out such cliffs and ramparts and waterfalls as would be too incongruous, was reciting whole pages of highland scenery. Since then he has grown bold under my apparent unsuspicion. I listen attentively, and probably look as edified as I feel. It is almost as pathetic as it is ludicrous. He must have sat up many nights to learn all that stuff, and I laugh at him in my sleeve; but I can't find it in my heart to tell him that I know, and the memory of my Lilton meadows has become confused and lurid. Stirling is absurdly young in many things, and his lack of humor is a trial; but he is clever and shrewd in other directions, besides which he thinks I have all the known virtues, with the addition of a few invented for my particular use, and such an attitude is very gratifying in a constant companion."

Walter listened and laughed, but felt none the less heavy hearted.

"Have n't you anything to tell me about your own affairs?" asked Dan at last, and Walter could contain himself no longer. He turned about and grasped Dan's hand.

"I have won her!" he cried, with joy and triumph in his voice.

Dan nearly wrung his hand off. "But what a secretive dog you are!" he said. "Why did n't you tell me before, instead of letting me talk on about myself?"

Walter needed no encouragement to continue. He extolled, declaimed, and congratulated himself in a more or less insane manner and at indefinite length, for being what he firmly believed he was — the happiest man in the world. The reserve and quiet of a lifetime were forgotten, and for this one hour Walter was nothing but a love-mad boy.

Dan wondered if he could ever have sounded so deliriously foolish if things had turned out differently. He thought not; his love for Winifred had always been too deep and sacred to speak of, even with Walter.

"I suppose you go back to her this evening," he said.

"I promised." Walter spoke doubtfully, for he

remembered that not even Stirling would be with Dan to-night.

"Of course. You would n't be fool enough to stay over for me, even if I did n't always go with Kate to the Saturday evening concert."

"With Kate — you mean Kate Randolph?" asked Walter quickly.

"Yes. I think I used to be unjust to poor Kate."

"Why poor Kate?"

"Because something in her voice tells me she is a very unhappy woman."

Dan's face and words were unsuspecting, but it seemed odd that Kate should take to concert going.

When the moment for parting arrived, Walter took his leave reluctantly. "You must n't think this will make any difference between you and me," he said.

Dan smiled.

"Hang it all," exclaimed Walter, "you do think so. What 's the use of getting married, if old friends are going to the wall?"

"I don't know," said Dan. "I am not getting married."

Chapter XIX

KATE ATONES

THAT night's concert had been postponed, as Dan had known when he sent Walter away; so there followed hours of silence, while he sat alone in the dark, fighting with such untamable elements as still cried out in his life.

Walter's visit had stirred memories of what had been, and of what might have been, if fate had not chosen to make him blind. His thoughts grew clamorous as hungry things will, and with head in hands he wrestled with himself till the night seemed nearly over, when he felt the hands of the clock to find that it was only ten.

He stretched out his long arms and knew their strength; he counted the years of his life and knew his youth. Then he groped his way to a chair.

"I wonder if I shall ever have the satisfaction of knowing why I was born," he said aloud.

Suddenly he heard Kate's voice. "May I come in, Dan?" she called.

"I am not sure," he answered as he opened the door for her. "It was imprudent of you to come. I hope no one saw you."

"Will you hold my cloak while I find a light?" she answered, quietly ignoring his fear for her.

As she touched the electric button she scanned Dan's face eagerly and saw signs of recent strife.

"You have been having the blues," she said.

"I think every blue devil that walks abroad is rampant to-night. Your voice tells me they have been with you, too."

"You have a quick ear, Dan. I am on my way to a party next door; but it is early yet, and I have some things to say to you. First, you must let me stir the fire. It is bitterly cold here."

Dan was pleased by the sound of a woman's voice, and the gentle rustle of her skirts; very soon he felt a welcome warmth from the revived fire. Kate's opera cloak still lay across his knees.

"It is nice to have you here," he said; "but you ought not to have come. I suppose the party accounts for the magnificence of this cloak. It seems to be all lace and velvet and things. I don't think I have had anything so pretty in my hands for many a long day. What color is it?"

"Yellow," said Kate.

Dan remembered an evening when Winifred

had worn a yellow dress. He did not speak again at once, and Kate watched him from where she knelt on the hearth-rug, her brilliant dress in strange contrast to the bareness of the room.

"I am going away," she said suddenly.

"Going away?"

"Yes. I have brought you my season ticket for our concerts. Give it to any one you choose. Where shall I put it?"

"On the table, please. I can't think of any one to give it to just now. Why are you going?"

"Mamma is ill. The doctor says we must go away. I shall not come back."

"I shall miss you, Kate."

"Really, Dan?"

"'Really — truly,'" he quoted the childish phrase with a smile. "Perhaps you will come back."

"No — I am going to marry Lord de Normandy."

"You love him?"

"No."

"I hope you will be happy."

"But you don't think so; neither do I. Mamma will be, and she has n't many years to live."

"That is a wrong idea of sacrifice," said Dan quickly.

"Not for me. After all, it does n't make so much difference what one does. The great thing is to get through with it — life, I mean — as soon as possible."

"I have never felt that I had the right to ask you what your trouble was," said Dan.

She still knelt on the hearth-rug and leaned her head against the arm of a chair.

"I have loved one man all my life, and — that is all," said Kate.

"That is the worst." He spoke gravely and pityingly. "Is there another woman?"

"Yes; but if there were not it would have been the same — for me."

The firelight danced and gleamed on the bare room, on Dan with his stern, gravely brooding face, on Kate's brilliant dress, on Kate's closed eyes, and the tears that slipped from under her lids. The clock struck.

"I ought to go," she said, but knelt on without moving. "And this is good-by. We have n't got much out of life, have we, Dan? I wonder how much longer it is going to last."

"I sometimes wonder that myself."

"I don't suppose we shall pass this way again," continued Kate. "We have had our chance and we have lost it. Life ought not to have failed for

you," she said passionately. "For me — that was different. I brought things on myself; but you, Dan, you deserved the best."

"Instead of which, something stepped on me," he interrupted dryly. "It seems as if there must be a mistake somewhere, does n't it?"

Kate rose. "I must go," she said.

"Tell me first if this De Normandy is a good sort of man."

"Would the best sort of man marry me?"

"I hoped that was all over," said Dan earnestly.

"It has been — since I have been with you — since last winter, I mean. Oh, Dan, you believe me, don't you?" There was piteous appeal in her voice.

"I do, Kate."

She caught her breath. "We are parting, you know — and — and there is one more thing. You remember once I listened — and you thought I would tell — you despised me so." Her voice failed, and he stood above her waiting, ignorant of the passion of appeal, despair, and love that was in her face.

"You looked at me," she continued breathlessly, "and the look has been scorching my life away ever since. Could n't you take it back now? I was wrong to listen; but I thought trouble was

coming to you. And I would n't have told, not if they had killed me for it. So can't you take back what you thought of me then, now that we are parting — now that we are parting, Dan — Won't you try, honestly, to take it back?"

"I think I can take it back without trying very hard," he said kindly. "Indeed, I took it back some time ago. I am sorry I was so much of a brute; it is you who must try to forgive me. You see I was n't very cheerful at that time."

He held out his hand to her.

"Poor little Kate," he said.

She clung to him. "You mean it — Yes, I know you mean it. I was so afraid to ask. Good-by, Dan — Don't always remember me by to-night. I don't usually talk so about myself — only we were parting, and you understand — partly. When I tell mamma, she says I ought not to blame her for my unhappiness, because she has always done her duty by me, and sent me to the best dressmakers." Kate laughed mournfully.

"Poor little Kate," said Dan again.

"Don't — don't be kind to me. I can't bear it to-night. And there is one thing more." She faltered and caught her voice on the edge of a frightened sob. "There is one thing I want to ask of you; I will never ask anything again. But

you say — you said just now that you had changed your mind about me. I know I have n't been the right sort of girl, not the kind the best men want for sisters or wives. And then you looked at me that way, and I understood for the first time, and I have tried to change — only people would not believe me. It makes it so hard when no one believes. But there has n't been anything since that you could n't respect. I swear it, Dan — I swear it — Oh, my God, how can I make you believe me!"

"Hush, Kate — hush. I do believe you."

She was quivering hysterically.

"I never had a brother to tell me, or to care how I went. Mamma never cared, nor you. But now — now that we are parting, do you think you could — you said you believed me — do you think you could kiss me just once as a brother kisses a sister he respects? I never had any one to kiss me that way, and if you could — if you can't, don't pretend — but if you could kiss me just once like that — I think — I think it would make me a better woman all my life, Dan."

"My poor little girl! Where are you?"

She came to him, and bending, he kissed her lightly on the forehead. He was pale, for it might

have been Winifred, but he kept Kate's hands, though she trembled and tried to draw from him.

"Be careful what you do. Living can hurt too much to be trifled with," he said. "I cannot bear to think of your marrying this man. Have you given the other one a fair chance?"

"Yes, it 's no use. I was fool enough to think it might be — once. It does n't matter for me. I shall do as well with De Normandy as I could with any one."

She looked up into his face, and met the unseeing eyes. "I never can believe it has come to you," she whispered tremulously.

"Why not to me as well as to another?"

"If I could only think of you as happy I should n't mind the other things so much. I think — I think you will be happy some day. Dan, the last time I went to New York — I never told you — but I want you to know before I go — I saw Winifred, and she never heard — about you — till this autumn. My letter miscarried."

"That 's all right," said Dan.

"She told me to tell you," continued Kate. "She looked as if her heart were broken, Dan. If you saw her you would hardly know her."

"I am not likely to see her," he answered dryly.

Kate was talking insane nonsense, and he evidently resented intrusion into his holy of holies; but she went on bravely.

"She is going to sing next week at the Cosmopolitan. Are you going to hear her?"

"I had not thought of it."

"She wants you to be there."

"Suppose we change the subject, Kate?"

Then Kate told her last lie.

"She told me she hoped you would be there. Good-by, Dan — good-by."

He heard Kate close the door, listened to her vanishing steps, then went back to silence and loneliness.

Kate sobbed as she ran down the dark stairway. "He will marry Winifred some day," she cried, "but nothing can ever make me forget that once he kissed me as a brother would kiss a sister he honored."

Dan sat in his chair. It was not in the man to suspect Kate's love for him. He knew as little of it as he knew of the light that streamed into his eyes. There was only room in his thoughts for one love, and this great love must be love without service to the end. An hour later he had not

moved, and iron tongues from the church spires called out the midnight.

"Life is long," he said aloud to himself. "The mills of God grind slowly." And he bowed his head as if in prayer.

Chapter XX

DOCTOR DAVAGE AGAIN

DAN decided to go on to New York for Winifred's début; also he would call upon her, and stop her from worrying about the lost letter. He did not feel sure that she would care to see him; but it could not do any harm to take one hour of her life, and he was hungering intolerably for the sound of her. "She will have to want to see me," he said with a whimsical flash of his old arrogance.

Poor Kate had evidently some ridiculous notions about Winifred's feeling for him; but it was possible she wished him to be present at her début, and he felt that he had received orders. He must take Stirling, of course, and leave his business to Providence and the devil. He told himself that he was a fool; but felt the fact to be immaterial.

A few days before his departure, he was coming home from his office, when a vaguely familiar voice addressed him.

"I am Dr. Davage," said the voice. "You

should have good cause to remember me. I thought I should like to see what had become of you."

"Which is easily seen."

"And that means that you want to be rid of me. Won't you dismiss your companion instead, and let me walk with you wherever you are going?"

Dan smiled. "I should not imagine myself a good advertisement for an oculist," he said. "You may go, Stirling. Take a bicycle ride. Never mind the work. You 're tired — I hear it in your voice."

The doctor looked keenly into Dan's face. "You are killing yourself by degrees," he observed. "I suppose you know that."

"I had n't thought about it," said Dan tranquilly.

"Then you 're playing a fool's part. When your health goes, work goes with it. Why have n't you shot yourself? I never believed you would stick it out two years."

"I am inclined to think you ought to be ashamed of yourself," said Dan. "Suppose I were to take your advice."

"You would do no more than I intend doing myself."

"You mean" —

"Exactly. I have a trouble which won't kill or cure, but I have no mind to lengthen the chain

of an unprofitable existence, and am debating as to the easiest way of ending it. Won't you have a light?"

"No, thank you. I can't seem to enjoy smoking in the dark."

"True, the blind don't smoke. Seems like adding insult to injury, does n't it?"

"You mean depriving a man of sight and vices at the same time? I have thought so myself."

The doctor grinned delightedly. "I like to see a fellow game, though he is a fool," he said. "Let 's argue the matter out. What have you got from existence during the last two years?"

"No particular satisfaction."

"What has any one else got from it?"

"Nothing, that I can think of at the moment."

"Why not get out then? It 's easy enough."

"In the first place I am inclined to think it a sin."

"Bah! I did n't suppose you would be afraid of a sin."

Dan smiled. "I could n't be more afraid of anything than I am of living. But some one sooner or later suffers from every sin that is committed. I don't want to swell the world's sum of pain."

"So you believe in divine ordering? You have reverence."

"There is something bigger than myself, or I should not be blind to-day."

"Nonsense, my dear sir, nonsense! It is fate, circumstance, — call it what you will."

"Exactly. Call it what you will."

"I see; you call it God."

"I am not sure."

"Ah." The doctor was silent for a short time. "Ah," he said again. "I was right. You have reverence, too much to label and ticket your beliefs. You 're one of the devout freethinkers. The twentieth century will be peopled with them." He puffed impatiently at his cigar. "It is the insolence of the whole business that I don't like," he continued. "We never asked to be born."

"It does seem as if we might have been consulted about that," Dan admitted.

"We are not consulted about coming here, nor about much that happens while we are here. Why should we submit? There is only one way of defying fate. I am going to profit by it. I rather hoped you would, too, — it would be vastly more sociable."

"No. I shall keep at it as I have begun," said Dan. "Nobody ever lived who did n't die. I can keep that knowledge for days of unusual length. I would n't do it if I were you, doctor. You 're

too good a man. Think about it, and remember there 's nothing to prevent your going any moment you want."

"There 's something in that view," said Davage. "And it would be interesting to know what became of you."

"I am written in the past tense," said Dan, "but you — what if you are ill. Good God, man, you have your sight!" He spoke with fierce, sudden passion, and then he caught himself and almost immediately raised a white face with a twisted smile on it. "I don't think any one ever heard me do that," he said.

Dr. Davage answered nothing for a moment, and Dan walked in silence also. "There is something else beside his blindness," thought the doctor. "Perhaps some fool of a woman has jilted him."

"I wish I might have met a man like you earlier," he continued aloud. "It is too late now."

"It 's never too late," said Dan.

"Yes it is. We 've lived our lives, and I am on the brink. It seems as if we ought to have more than one chance of living, does n't it?"

"I don't want another — I got too hard hit the first time."

"Well, well, perhaps you 're right. I sha'n't

see you again after to-day. You 're a brave fellow, Howard, but I think you 're a fool for your pains."

It happened that on the afternoon of Dan's journey to New York, Dr. Davage knocked at the door of his room. "Do you know me this time?" he asked.

"Yes — so you thought better of it."

"Humph! if you call it better. Let me sit down. The stairs have knocked me up."

"I am sorry," said Dan. "Can't I get you something? I think I might find some whiskey after a certain amount of blundering."

"No, it will pass — it 's my heart." Dan found his way back to a chair.

"I am sorry my secretary is buying railroad tickets," he said; "he might have been of some use."

"I don't want your secretary," said the doctor testily, being much put to it to get his breath. "Why do you live seven stories high?"

"I used to like the view," said Dan with a dry smile. "And when my eyes went, I knew the lay of the land, and could find things."

"It's rather a gloomy looking room, but I don't suppose you mind that."

"It does n't trouble me seriously," answered Dan.

There was a kindness in the doctor's voice that took from his pitiless plainness of speech.

"I came to tell you that I have decided to stick it out," he said after a pause.

"I am glad to hear that," Dan answered heartily. "What changed your mind?"

"I saw you find your way upstairs alone the other day after I said good-by."

"Ah — and the moral of that is" — There was an almost imperceptible contraction of Dan's lips.

"I was ashamed of myself. If you could stand up under such fire, I thought I might face mine."

"That 's rather amusing," said Dan.

"Can't see it," answered Davage.

"I always knew I must be a spectacle when I went round by myself, — people can look the other way if they don't like it, — but now it seems I am a promoter of virtue."

"I am glad you regard it as a virtue; I call it damned obstinacy, or pride, or anything else you like. But I thought it might be a satisfaction to you to know that your example is responsible for my continued existence — and suffering. In fact, I came up these troublesome stairs to-day to tell you that as far as I am responsible, I shall continue

to exist and suffer as long as you do. Do you expect me to thank you for it?"

"No," answered Dan.

"That 's sensible of you, for I am not conscious of gratitude — as yet. It will be interesting to see what becomes of you."

Davage looked at him for a little while in silence, then he rose and put a hand on his shoulder.

"Do you know that I like you better than any man I ever saw?" he said.

"That 's curious," answered Dan. "I like you, too, which is more curious still, for you don't spare my sensibilities especially."

"I am not as bad as I sound."

"I have suspected as much."

"So it 's friendship, then — for what 's left to us?"

"Here 's my hand on it," said Dan.

"And if I don't bring you anything else, you will have the never ending satisfaction of knowing that you are responsible for my being alive, and cursing pretty much every day that comes along."

"Thanks," said Dan. "I don't get much satisfaction from life, so I 'll make the best of that."

Chapter XXI

WINIFRED AND DAN

THE day before Winifred's appearance at the Cosmopolitan was bitterly cold. She shivered and drew her furs about her as she stepped into the street after the last rehearsal. The occasion had been a trying one: the tenor was hoarse and had sworn — with due regard for vocal cords — at his inability to sustain his highest note. The contralto had flatted, and ruined her duet with Winifred, who shared the consequent blame. The impresario, who sat in the first gallery, was out of temper, and shouted hoarse commands across a waste of empty theatre. Nothing went well, and the cast — an illy clad set of Italians and French — frowned upon Winifred, who had laughed when the high-priest tripped over his worsted muffler in the very act of a solemn prayer.

Every one has heard of the disillusion of an empty theatre, and many have seen it — the barren stage, with its dust and heaps of shabby scenery,

the vast, dimly lighted, echoing spaces beyond, and the gaping galleries.

When Winifred stepped on the stage for her last duet and solo, she had been in a mood of reckless misery, and looking into the shadowy theatre had sung out something of the passion and despair that was in her heart.

The chorus ceased whispering, and the impresario nodded, and rubbed his hands. "Zat will do — zat will do," he exclaimed, coming down to the footlights when she had finished. "If you sing like zat to-morrow night — I gives you any single zing you want; but if you do not" — He shook his fist playfully, and dismissed the troupe with restored good-humor. Winifred went out into the early twilight, shivering, and, partly because of a deadly weariness, forgetful of her success.

There was no cab as usual at the corner, and the cars were crowded with Christmas shoppers. In spite of her fatigue, Winifred preferred walking to the crush of a Broadway train, and the rattle of Fifth Avenue 'buses jarred her nerves intolerably. Nerves were a new discovery to Winifred, as was the possibility of being tired and the wakeful nights. She despised herself for these

weaknesses; surely Dan would have been braver. To-day she was more tired than usual, and the ache of simple every-day existence seemed almost unbearable. Of course she would live to be old — she was so strong, and after awhile living would n't hurt so much; but Winifred knew she could never be very glad, or very sorry, for anything again.

The walk home seemed endless, and she told herself the twilight on the snow was as the light on a dead face. At her hotel the elevator boy informed her that a gentleman was waiting in her apartments; and in the parlor she found dusk, and firelight, and Dan rose to meet her. She gave a little cry when she saw him, and stood still on the threshold.

"Is it you, Winifred?" he asked.

She went to him swiftly. "You surprised me — I did n't expect you," she said, hoping he would not hear the breathlessness in her voice.

His hand held hers with the strong clasp she knew so well; but standing before the unseeing eyes it seemed as if her heart broke afresh.

"How was the rehearsal?" he asked her quite naturally. "But you have grown thin," he added. "Why is that?"

With a great effort Winifred commanded her-

self. "How did you know I had been to a rehearsal, or that I had grown thin?" she was able to ask him lightly.

"Edith told me the first — she has gone out now with Walter, who brought me here. The second I felt when you gave me your hand. Are n't you well, Win? Kate feared you were not."

She drew her breath sharply. Had he come to tell her of his engagement?

"Why have you come?" she asked.

"Because I wanted to," he answered dryly; "and now that I am here I must remind you of the insignificant fact that I am blind, that I don't know where the chair is I have just left, and that I must stand indefinitely unless you show me to another. Possibly you prefer standing, in which case I am willing to stand also; but we should both be uncomfortable and" — Winifred's hands were on his arm.

"I am so sorry!" she interrupted brokenly, "I was thinking — I mean — but don't think I ever forget for a single hour, or minute, or second — don't think I shall ever forget till I die" —

"There, there," he said quickly, "I did n't want you to say all that; I was in fun."

"What kind of a chair do you like? Have you grown very particular about your chairs?"

Winifred asked, with something that might have been a sob or a laugh.

"I prefer one with arms, if you ask me," he said, "for I like to be able to get hold of something with my hands." He laughed himself through set teeth. "We did n't use to do things this way — did we, Win?" he added as she took him to a seat.

Then he asked her about herself, her health, her success or failure. He had heard the catch in her voice when she first saw him, and told himself that probably he was something of a shock to her since he had gone blind, for she had been fond of him if she had been fond of any one. If seeing him continued to distress her as it had done to-day, he must keep out of her way; but he hoped she would get used to it, for now that she knew he made no claims on her, there could be no harm in his seeing her once a year or so, learning of her life from her own lips, knowing the strong joy of being near her, and going to hell for a day or two afterwards.

There was no one thing he could give her, no service he could ever render her while he lived — that was the worst of it. He would have liked to have stood between her and the world, instead of

which he could only hope not to be a shadow on her life.

Perhaps — when she got used to seeing him stumble and grope — she might be glad to meet him from time to time, for she had given him the best she had for eight years, and he had been the only man in her life. Dan knew this as he knew his own soul.

In the mean time she seemed to be getting used to him. She answered him naturally, told of her life in Russia, of the people she had met, of where she had succeeded and failed. The mutual sympathy and comprehension that had been theirs in the past was like an undertow between them to-day; each knew the other's unspoken word, and the larger meaning of the spoken one. So it happened that in the joy of this hour's companionship they forgot past and future.

His interest was vital and inexhaustible, and the old whimsical humor was keen as ever. Often he would laugh at her. "That is so like you, Win," and again he would disapprove and scold her. "If I had been there you would not have done it," he said to her once.

"I know it," she admitted, "but you see you were not, so I did; but I knew what you would

say. I always knew how you would feel about everything; I used to long to talk things over with you. I could n't understand why you did n't write — you see I never knew " —

They paused, and realizing the brink of the precipice could forget no longer.

" I never heard, till I came back two or three months ago."

" I know," he answered. " Kate told me her letter did not reach you."

" And you thought I knew, Dan, all these years, and kept silent? "

" What else could you have done? — crossed the ocean to tell me you were sorry? I can't have you troubled about that; Kate gave me to understand that you were troubled."

Kate again; what else had Kate told him? Winifred was not jealous, and she had thought her love too great for pride; but the blood rushed hotly to her head. Had Dan suspected, and was he trying to be good to her?

" Kate was right," she said with a firm, clear ring to her voice. " I was troubled — it seemed a poor return " —

" Did I ever ask for payment, Winifred? " He spoke gravely and proudly, and her own pride fell before the memory of that past.

"You don't understand," she said brokenly.

"Perhaps not, it does n't matter now, only I won't have you worried."

"No, it does n't matter now," she repeated. There was a note of heart-break in her voice. The room was quite dark, save for the firelight; and they were silent.

Dan spoke first. "I am afraid I worry you, Winifred," he said. "You seem to have notions about unpaid debts of gratitude, and other nonsense; besides which, I suppose my blindness troubles you somewhat, and makes the debt seem worse. If this is so, tell me plainly, — it is the only charity I ask of you, — and I 'll never come within the sound of your voice again."

"You don't understand," she said, and paused; when she spoke again, he had to listen for the words.

"I feel I may never see you after to-night, Dan. Whether I fail or succeed to-morrow, I sail next month for Europe, and such home as I know must be there."

There was no faltering in the low, even voice, but she paused now and again, and then he could hear the ashes fall from the dying fire.

"Before we part I want to say one thing: there can be no such words as debt or gratitude between

us, and pride is a small thing; so I want you to know that there has never been another friend in my life than you, Dan, and this will still be true — at the end."

There was another silence, and the low voice dropped lower.

"In the past you did me the honor to wish for my love; it was, and will always be the honor of my life. I may have denied this love, but I knew it would be yours or no one's; I knew that years ago, as I know it to-day, and as I shall know it in the hour of my death. I tell you this because, as the years go on, you will blame me unless you understand, and because I cannot bear that you should think I want to pay you, even if payment were necessary or possible."

He did not answer her till he could do so lightly.

"You are generous to speak these words," he said, "but don't for an instant imagine that I expect you to make them good. You are still obstinate in denying yourself a heart; I supposed you had learned better. As for thinking you cannot love any one, because you could not love me, that is nonsense, as you must find out some day." He paused, and then laughed a short, grim laugh. "You should have loved me, Winifred, and no

other — if I had not lost my sight — and though it took a lifetime to make you," he said.

Womanlike, she loved him better for his audacious strength than for a thousand speeches of humility and self-effacement. She could have laughed with him from pride; but instead she cried within herself, "My God — what I have lost!" How had she lost it? how was it possible that such love could have died? He had chosen that it should — that was the only explanation — he had chosen, and it had come to pass.

Suddenly she spoke with passionate questioning.

"Dan, how have you done it? How have you overcome? Do you — can you believe for a single hour that what has come to you is best?"

He did not answer her at once. There was no bitterness, but an immense gravity in his face.

"Yes — I think I can believe that much," he said quietly. "Perhaps not best for me; but best, and necessary to the ultimate intention."

"I don't understand," she cried bitterly.

"Neither do I, altogether; we only see the half. But law and order are eternal verities. When a law is broken, a life must fall and break to restore the balance, for it seems to have been necessary since the beginning of the world that some should

fall by the wayside that many may reach the heights."

"That is cruel," whispered Winifred; "must we perish that others may live?"

"Better that, than perish to no purpose. What is troubling you, Winifred? There is something, I know."

"Only the cruelty — the cruelty of it."

"Dear child — I am so sorry," said Dan, "and you won't tell me what it is? But try not to worry. Some day you will learn that the ultimate meaning of it all is happiness — through love; and I don't believe any of us can sin or suffer so greatly that we shall not come into our own at the end."

"Dan," she almost whispered, "do you ever — pray?"

"Why, no," he answered, "not as men mean prayer. It always seems an impertinence to divine reason. The only real prayer is in beholding and worshiping."

"I know — I know; but sometimes when we are weak, we cry out just as one does in bodily pain, without hoping for relief; but just because we must. Have you ever prayed that way, Dan?"

"I am afraid I have cried out once or twice," he confessed.

A log from the fire broke suddenly, and she saw his face turned towards her with something of wistfulness in it.

"You say you are going away, Win? It would be rather nice to see your face once before you go. You have changed — I heard it first in your voice, and now I know it from your words. You are in trouble, and I suspect you of doing something foolish; but how can I know without seeing you, and how can I scold you if I don't know?"

"I have n't been doing anything foolish, Dan, and I don't deserve to be scolded," she said, her lips tremulous with the pity his strength had almost made her forget. She was looking at the deeply lined face, and realized that it was suddenly sad with a very dreadful sadness, and he had been speaking to her as he had done long ago — when he loved her. Her heart gave a great leap, like some glad, half-tamed thing. Then she told herself that she was mad to hope.

"We are going to say good-by," she said aloud, "and won't you tell me how it is with you? Your power — your success — it means something to you?"

"What it is worth — no more, no less," he said.

"You have not answered me, Dan."

"You 're trying to make me whine, Winifred."

She was silent; then —

"There is one more thing" —

"A question?"

"Yes, the last I shall ever ask you."

"Well, I am waiting."

"You remember once, long ago, we stood by the stone wall near the apple-tree, and vowed to have no secrets from each other — ever — so long as we lived?"

"Yes; the apple-tree died last year, and the boy who made the vow died two years ago. Evidently you 're afraid to ask that question."

"No, I shall ask it. Tell me first why the apple-tree died?"

"It was burned; with the old barn."

"So the old barn is burned." Winifred paused. "It is hard to believe, Dan." Her voice was suddenly low, and eager, and tremulous. "Dan, there was a place in the loft, where"—

"I know," said Dan.

"Tell me now if you love Kate?"

"If I love Kate?" He repeated her words slowly — with reproach. "If I love Kate? — Winifred! Winifred!"

"Then — no — I hear Edith and Walter in the entry." Winifred spoke rapidly, with a strange ring to her voice. "After all, I think I will ask

you one more question, and see you once again. Listen, Dan, and promise me quick before they come in. I sing to-morrow night — you will be there to hear me; and after, the next day, you will come here — promise me you will come."

"Why, yes, Win, if you wish, but what" —

"Never mind, the questions are all mine now. Remember you have promised."

"Yes," said Dan, growing suddenly grave, and then Edith and Walter entered the room.

Chapter XXII

WOMAN AND ARTIST

DURING the past few days many rumors had gone abroad concerning Winifred Meredith and her appearance before the New York public. Some people said that Daniel Howard had come on from Boston to marry her, and take her away on the eve of her performance. How her operatic contract had been disposed of no one could explain; but it was argued that a woman in love disdains contracts, and believed among the ignorant that Daniel Howard could do what he chose with contracts, legal or illegal. Other people claimed that Winifred had lost her voice in the New York climate, and that her name appeared on the bills merely to swell the impresario's bank account. Still more claimed for her a voice and talent such as had not been heard since the days of Patti, while others asserted that her voice amounted to little, but that her beauty was great, which accounted for a certain success with the European public. The only undisputed fact was that Winifred Meredith had no superior

in birth or breeding, and the ticket agents were kept inconveniently busy for several days before the performance.

The day itself was an anxious one for four people. Edith was especially troubled, for Winifred's voice had been uncertain all winter, and there were hundreds of people waiting to hear and condemn her. Walter was anxious because Edith was, and Dan had been entertained by them both with stories of Winifred's shaken nervous system, and tortured with fear that she was overdoing, and would ruin her health by her profession. More nervous than all was Herr Grün, the impresario. He had staked a good deal on this new singer's success. If she failed, he would be out of pocket for extensive advertising outlays; but if she succeeded, if she sang as she had sung yesterday in the empty theatre, Herr Grün would be a made man. One of the best voices, the most perfect training, and the most magnetic genius in the operatic world would be his.

He called to see Winifred that morning, to assure himself that all went well. "In ze name of ze Blessed Virgin, do not talk," he entreated her, "or laugh; was it you laughing as I came in?"

Winifred said that it was, and she laughed again, an odd, joyous, reckless little laugh. "Ach! mein

Gott!" you drive me on ze verge of ze distraction," cried Herr Grün. "It is better to talk even, zan to laugh — and ze cold! and ze snow outside! — are you sure you have not a hoarseness; try a note for me."

Winifred took a chest tone and swept upwards triumphantly to a high B. She held the note, played with it, swelled it, hit it again and again, trilled on it, and finally let it trail off into a tiny sound of shivering ecstasy. Then she turned away, laughing.

"Himmel! zat is enough — enough; more zan enough — you will tire yourself for to-night; but what a voice! what a voice! Zere is only one ozer in ze world who can do zat to-day. If you sing so to-night, you have ze world at your feet to-morrow; and yet you talk — you laugh, and lose your chance. But you will not dare — Ach! you will not dare to go out in ze air wiz your mouf uncovered. Tell me you will not dare."

"Do not worry about me, Herr Grün; everything is going well," said Winifred.

But he shook his head as he left the room. "She would dare," he told himself. "Zere is a new look in her eyes to-day. When a woman looks so — she dares anyzing — ze heaven, or ze hell, or ze world between."

Winifred alone was not anxious. There was a strange intensity about her this morning, and Edith wondered at her smiling eyes and grave lips. All winter Winifred had smiled with her lips only. Yet Edith did not wonder much, for Dan had been there the day before, and she had found Winifred and him sitting in the twilight when she came home to make tea for Walter, and Winifred's face had been almost beautiful with tenderness and radiance when she looked at Dan; while Dan himself was graver than usual, but less stern, and his face turned toward the sound of Winifred wherever she moved, and great sadness and great love had been in that face for any one to see.

Through this day of anxious waiting, Winifred told her nothing; but she wore the look of one who holds a wonderful secret. At last the night came. The audience filled tiers and boxes, and overflowed into the aisles. It was a magnificent house. "The biggest one there has been for years," announced Edith, who slipped into Winifred's dressing-room to see that everything was well.

"Oh! Win, dear, I hope you're going to sing your best."

"Has Dan come?" asked Winifred.

"Yes, I passed him as I came along. He looks a good deal upset."

"Tell him not to worry," she said.

Edith left her standing in a blaze of lights, while two maids arranged the folds of her priestess robes; but Winifred's face was pale and rapt, with smiling eyes and grave lips, which suggested the wind and starlight that were above the footlights and the people, their praise or their blame.

"How does she say she feels?" asked Walter, who met Edith on her return from the wings.

"She said nothing, except to ask if Dan were here, and to send him word not to worry. Something wonderful is going to happen, Walter; wait and see."

They stopped for a moment by Dan, who was sitting with Stirling in the first gallery.

"She says you 're not to worry," Edith told him, with dancing eyes.

"That 's all very well," complained Walter, "but how can she tell till she begins to sing? This public life is a bad business. If she does n't succeed, Edith will be miserable for a week."

Dan smiled. "If it were possible for Winifred to make more than one first appearance, I should fear for your life's happiness, Wally," he said.

The house was full, and the audience were waiting, gossiping, and speculating the while on Winifred's probable looks and talent. Those who knew

"Lakmé," that most impetuous, seductive exotic of operas, wondered if any woman New England born and bred could be temperamentally equal to it. Artists questioned the power of so young a voice to sustain the passionate, soaring music. There were some present who remembered Winifred Meredith as a vigorous young hoyden with a mass of straight dark hair, and a glance and speech of singular directness; these last waited her appearance as a prima donna with amused curiosity.

The opening measures of the opera were listened to with indifference, and the tenor's singing of his beautiful solo roused the first enthusiasm. In the hush that followed his applause there floated out from behind the scenes some soprano notes, sweet, virginal, strangely thrilling, and the next moment Lakmé stepped into the garden, a priestess of the gods, childlike and queenlike. Robed in trailing folds of white, an arch of diamonds spanning her dark hair, she moved through the flowers, joyous and regal, with serene eyes and laughing lips, singing as the first woman might have sung in the garden of Paradise before learning the lesson of sin and pain. Her voice recalled to world-worn men and women half forgotten memories of dawns when the world had been young for them, and some faded eyes were dim with tears for a childhood that had

been sweet and true. The story moved quickly, borne by the impetuous music that was full of sensuous, unexpected cadences, music that charmed and bewitched. Still a child of the gods, she played in the gorgeous garden till a man came, and looking into her eyes sang of joy and love, and she was priestess no longer; but a woman with burning lips and eyes. Her voice deepened, grew warm, luxurious, vibrant, tropical.

"What an actress!" said some.

"What a singer!" said others.

"What a woman!" said a few who were wise and knew that none can give what they have not.

The ballet and gorgeous spectacle in the first part of the second act aroused scant interest in the audience, but when Lakmé came forward to sing the famous *air des cloches*, men and women held their breath. This great aria demands all that a singer's throat can do. Winifred sang it with audacious ease. The house rang with magnetic, compelling notes, daring flights of execution, runs that tingled on the air like whiplashes, long-drawn tones in the *mezza voce*, notes of bewildering sweetness that floated and thrilled and brought tears of exquisite delight to the listeners' eyes; yet never for an instant could it be forgotten that she was a woman who loved and feared, and was in mortal

anguish while singing in the market-place to the betrayal of her lover.

Then enthusiasm ran like wildfire through the audience, and was only held in check after the fall of the curtain by impatience for the next and last act. Here it is that, united at last, Lakmé and Gerald sing together in the forest.

Passionately tender, deliriously sweet, was her voice then; rapturous and triumphant, swinging and soaring above orchestra and tenor in a very ecstasy of love. Hearing her, sordid men remembered the face of the woman they had first loved. Hearing her, worldly women saw the ideals of their girlhood looking out of the past, with beautiful, reproachful eyes. Hearing her, both men and women with jaded senses knew only the pain and sweetness and passion of grand elemental emotions. Such knowledge is not bought every day.

When the curtain had fallen on Lakmé's swift despair and tragic end, there followed one of those moments which sweep away the self-control of a lifetime. To-morrow would be time enough for reason; to-night was for splendid, delirious enthusiasm. She had made them live to the uttermost limits of their beings, lived as some had never dreamed of living, and no demonstration was too insane for her.

Again and again she came before the curtain, graceful and stately, but somewhat indifferent, to bow her acknowledgments, and every time she came the sound of voices was as the rush of a great tide, and the walls of the building shook.

Few had time to notice the one man among them who sat silent and bowed in his chair.

Dan heard her that night — Dan, whose senses were not jaded, who did not need to recall the face of the woman he had first loved, for the first woman had been the last. Hearing her he knew what he had always felt — that the wild, strong, passionate heart of her was as his own, that she was his by all laws human and divine. And more than this, Dan knew with a fierce, suffocating, almost maddening joy, that Winifred loved him. It was to him that she had sung, and to-morrow she would tell him of her love.

By the sounds of her triumph he guessed when she came before the lights, and once he raised his head, and turned his storm-beaten face toward her, as if he could see. There was only one word for him: renunciation. The head bowed again, and the broad shoulders bent lower.

Stirling touched his arm. "They are beginning to go," he said timidly.

Dan did not move.

"Has she come for the last time?" he asked.

"Yes."

Then Dan lifted his powerful frame slowly, as if under a burden, and put his hand out to the boy.

"We will go," he said.

Chapter XXIII

THE FULFILLING OF THE LAW

IT was the next day, and Edith looked at her sister with awe.

"Winifred, it was glorious!"

Winifred leaned her head on her hand; she was pale and oddly still. Only her eyes showed life — life burning, expectant, radiant.

"It was glorious! You have conquered, Win. You are a great artist, and the world knows it."

Winifred smiled. A London impresario had just called with a handsome offer, humbly proffered, for an engagement at Covent Garden. On the table lay a contract awaiting her signature, which assured her a little fortune for singing in ten performances to be given in New York during what remained of the season. The signature was withheld.

"Herr Grün's offer is a splendid one," continued Edith. "Why don't you sign it?"

Winifred took the precious document and tore

it across the middle. Then she folded it deliberately and tore it again.

"Winifred, you are crazy! Why, Win!"

Winifred rose and dropped the fragments into the fire. Then she laughed, softly, and recklessly, and gladly.

Edith went out in the early afternoon, and Winifred waited for Dan. He had promised — he would come. She leaned her elbows on the mantelpiece and watched the clock. It seemed that the hands scarcely moved, but suddenly she saw an hour had gone. "If Dan did not come to-day — if he had gone without seeing her," she caught her throat fiercely, and then somehow Dan was in the room. Winifred could never remember how he came there, for her nerves were strained to the breaking point.

"I thought you were not coming," she said breathlessly.

"I promised," he answered. His face was drawn and gray, and very stern. He had fought the night through with hungry devils, and with the higher longings of his being which were marshaled against the absolute, and clamoring for this woman; but when the day came he had conquered.

"You are late, Dan, and I have so much to tell

you," she said with a strange, sweet thrill in her voice.

He did not answer her; but sat with his elbow on the table, and his face shaded by his hand.

Winifred was white, with burning eyes. He heard her near him, he heard her catch her breath in the silence — then he heard her voice, low and clear. "Do you love me still, Dan?" she asked him.

"Yes, Winifred, I love you for all time," he answered with grave calm, "but we will talk of something else to-day."

"I brought you here for one thing," she said.

He knew he could not keep her from speaking, so he waited motionless.

"I love you, Dan — I love you."

The hand that hid his face shook a little; but his deep voice was steady, and tender beyond all words.

"My child," he said, "you do not know what you are saying."

"I know nothing else in all the world, Dan."

"You don't understand," he said. "You have a wonderful and glorious life before you — and I am blind, Winifred." Her hand stole into his.

"Do you think I love you less well for that?"

"I could have made you happy once," he con-

tinued, "but now I am worthless. To take your life would be a crime."

But she gave a laugh with a little sob in it. "I am afraid you must, Dan; there is nothing in the world for me but you, and — so — as you are responsible for the loss of the world, don't you think — don't you think it 's your duty — as an honorable man — to make the loss good to me? You don't know how well I love you. You are going to make me tell you and say the words a woman should leave to a man. Is it quite generous of you, dear?"

He bent his head, and she felt his lips tremble on her hand.

"I cannot do it," he said hoarsely. "God help me! I cannot take the sacrifice."

"Sacrifice! where is the sacrifice? I love you, Dan, — I love you, I say, and you do not believe it yet? Listen to me, Dan. You think I am offering you a slight thing born of pity, generosity, and some affection, which shows how little you know me. You think that because you are blind, you have less right than other men to hold a woman's love, which shows how little you know a woman's heart. Ah, Dan," — leaning on the table she bent over his bowed head with yearning tenderness — "can't you understand that just because you have not all most men have, I love you the more? Can't

you understand that for every lost happiness of yours I give you more love, and for every bitter moment more love? Dear, if it had been I instead of you that had been blind, would you have shrunk from me — loved me less?"

"If it had been you — if it had been you — hush, Winifred, don't say the words." He spoke brokenly.

"Yes, if it had been I instead of you, what would you have done? Answer me quickly, Dan."

He stretched out his hands with a passionate gesture.

"I should have taken you into my arms and never let you out of them till death came between us."

She gave a little cry that was half a sob.

"I knew it! I knew it! It is no use for you to turn your head away from me now." Kneeling beside him she spoke swiftly. "Listen to me, Dan. There has never been any one in the world for me but you, neither mother nor father nor brother nor friend; but I did not understand. I thought I had some power greater than the power of loving you; I thought the world could give me some honor greater than the honor of being loved by you. I thought life could give me some happiness greater than the happiness of being your wife. When I

heard what had come to you — oh, my love " — Her voice broke ; and then she went on with low-toned passionate tenderness. " It was the knowledge of your loss, dear, which showed me my gain. I knew then that I loved you, had always loved you, should always love you ; that there could never be honor nor power nor happiness apart from you. Dear, how long are you going to let me do the suing? Dan — listen, Dan — how often must I say the words? — I love you, dear — I love you — I love " —

With a great sob he swept her into his arms, silenced her lips with his kisses, drowned her thoughts, her consciousness almost, in the storm of his love, — love that had been chained and starved and denied during all the years of his youth and early manhood, love that had lost joy and hope, but would not falter nor turn pale, love that had come into its own at last. Finally she lay passive and breathless in his arms, while he murmured tender, incoherent sentences over her, kissed her hair, her eyes, her lips, and the beatings of their wild, powerful hearts grew quieter. Once she put up her hands with a little sob and touched his eyes, but he drew the hands down and laughed with his lips against her fingers.

" Now that I have the right to hold them always

here, I do not need to see that the sun shines," he said. "But can I make you happy?"

"That depends upon how well you are going to love me."

"You will go on with your career, Winifred?"

"No."

"But Winifred"—

"It would take me away from you."

Dan began to show signs of combativeness. "I cannot have you give that up," he said; "it is your life work."

"Dear, don't you know yet how well I love you?"

He was silent, and Winifred had withdrawn herself from him.

"Don't you want to make me happy, Dan?"

"God knows I do. Where are you, Winifred?"

"Then never try to send me away from you."

"Let it settle itself then — since you say so. But where are you Win? Come nearer — nearer yet. Remember I can't see you, dear, and deserve more privileges than most lovers."

Winifred slipped to her knees beside him and he touched her hair.

"Do you twist it in the same coil I used to know? No, don't tell me — I want to find it all out for

myself. Here is the parting; I remember how I used to love the silver line of it, and here are the smooth thick braids just the same. You have n't lost that one curl behind your left ear, have you? No, here it is — and on your forehead there used to be a place — yes, I have it — where the hair would not lie smoothly. It is better to kiss it so, and so, than be able to see it with the room between. I used to love it for breaking the line that might have been too severe over eyes less true and fine than yours."

He took her face between his hands and turned it up towards his own as if to look. "How many years of life would it be worth to see your eyes with love in them," he said.

She gave a little pitying cry and slipping her hands round his neck drew his head down to her own.

"Dearest, tell me — can I ever make up for the least part of your loss?"

"Where is your hand, love? Now you make up for all, save for not seeing your face. When will you marry me, Winifred? On what day, and hour, and minute?"

"On the one you say."

"To-morrow?"

"To-morrow! Is n't that too soon?"

"It is ten years too late."

In a little while she was laughing with her face against his shoulder.

"Dear — after all these years, are you not ashamed to have left me to do the final wooing?"

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